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Love's Victory.

BY B. L. FARJEON.

SCENE THE FIRST.

IN THE BANKING-HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPPELL, CHAPPELL, AND CHAPPELL, BANKERS.

THE great banking-house of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell, was known, and favorably known, far and wide, and had been established for as many scores of years as you can count upon your fingers. In the money world it was famous, and outside the boundaries of that Tom Tiddler's ground it commanded respect and admiration. Not only where the English language is spoken was the name known and honored, but where French, Dutch, Prussian, Italian, and German are the native vernaculars. On the Exchange it was all-powerful; in bank and mart it was regarded almost with affection; and foreign tongues, after their respective fashions, murmured it with veneration. It had taken root, as it were, and Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell across or at the foot of an oblong slip of paper, was a thing to conjure with. So potent was it, that one might have been pardoned for the fancy that if he had traveled with it into the bowels of the earth, and presented it to the genii who reign where the rough, bright gold lies hidden in reef of quartz and soil alluvial, he would have been received with obsequious attention, instantly loaded with bags of treasure, and sent up to earth rejoicing. Time was when the firm was known by the one simple name of Chappell; but as the business grew and increased, so the importance of its proprietors grew and increased. It was, therefore, quite consistent with this growth of personal importance that when a descendant more pompous and self-impressed than those who preceded him came into the firm, he should desire that his name should be added to the old one; and this being done, the firm became Chappell and Chappell. It is to be hoped that common persons had a sense sufficiently delicate and fine to distinguish between

the Chappells who aired their pomposity among them, and the Chappells whose pomposity (with bated breath be it spoken), had been aired by the worms, and sifted into dust long years ago. As time rolled on, the feathers of another pompous Chappell were fledged, and he, with a similar laudable desire for the recognition of his individuality, insisted that his name should be added to the firm, which therefore became Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell. And so, in accordance with the ambition of successive pomposities, Chappell might, to use a metaphor, have been piled on Chappell till the crack of doom—supposing the firm to last to that indefinite period—but for a glimmering idea that the thing was already overdone, and that a farther redundancy of Chappells might possibly cast a shadow of ridicule over the great House. Which, almost above every other consideration, was a possibility to be jealously guarded against.

Almost, but not quite above every other consideration; there was one other which was sacredly paramount; the honor and credit of the House. That a word should be whispered against the good name which the House had borne from the first year of its existence would have tortured the souls of the living Chappells, and might have animated with serious uneasiness the very dust of the departed. Above all other considerations was the good name to be maintained, unshaken, untarnished. And this was done religiously. If a word had ever been whispered against it, it had faded as utterly and effectually as the breath which might have been breathed upon the polished door-plates which bore the magic title of the firm. The House had played its part in troublous times, and had played it with unfaltering credit. Older firms than it, wealthier firms than it, had tottered and fallen, and passed out of existence; but nothing had ever shaken the credit of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell. Thrones had crumbled into dust, dynasties had been destroyed, the liberties of people had been juggled with; the scaffold had been busy with the high and mighty, but Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell remained unscathed, unsullied. It stood firm and erect through all these changes. Those whose worldly wealth its coffers guarded, slept in their beds with easy minds as to its safety. So thoroughly imbued were the members of the firm with a nice and strict sense of honor, that the judgment they passed upon men whose business conduct would not bear the light is easy of comprehension. A defaulter in money was, in their eyes, a vile and abhorrent creature.



LAURA RIGBY.

If they had written the fifth commandment, it would have read: "Honor the bills which Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell have discounted for thee, that thy days may be long on the earth which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

To lighten the intense and somewhat ponderous respectability of this description, and to show how jealous the House was of its name down to the very smallest detail, a circumstance may be briefly mentioned. At the death of one of the Chappells a tradesman was employed to cut the record of his virtues on his tombstone. To the indignation of the living members of the firm, he spelt the name with one L, and there was not room on the stone for another. The stone was returned to him, and when he applied for payment it was refused, on the ground that the order had not been properly executed. With some show of humor he offered to deduct from his account a proportionate sum for the omitted L, and when, even with this deduction, payment was still refused, he in his turn grew indignant, and revenged himself by indulging in the grim and not original joke that surely one L was enough for any man. Needless to say that from that moment the firm looked upon him as a pestilent member of society.

It had happened in the course of the firm's long business career that men whose names were not Chappell had been admitted into partnership, but not one of them was ever known to the world, in his business connection, by any other name than Chappell. Now and again changes had taken place in the proprietorship, but they were few and far between, and had not affected the character or the stability of the House. At one time a great Chappell had swallowed up all the lesser Chappells, after the fashion of the old Egyptian serpent; at another, half a dozen Chappells held nearly equal interests, but the business was conducted steadily and safely through all these variations, and at the opening of this history there were but two representatives of the name—Chappell father and Chappell son.

The son had not yet been admitted into the firm. It was a long-established custom with the House not to give the younger branches of the name a share in the business until they reached the age of thirty, by which time it was assumed that the wild oats which are the leading element in the education of the young men of a certain class are completely sown. Frederick Chappell was but twenty-eight years of age, and had two good years before him in which to complete the acquisition of that kind of knowledge which is popularly supposed to be so essentially necessary to men who are destined by the fortune of birth to occupy leading positions in society. In the mean time he was liberally supplied with money by his father—but still not so liberally as his needs required—and went through the farce of calling at the banking-house every day, and idling away an hour or two there, with the air of one whose presence was necessary to its well-being and prosperity. The younger clerks looked up to him with admiration, and in their humbler circles copied the fashion of his clothes. He was in every respect an elegant young man, much sought after by mothers in society who had marriageable daughters, and who heard with indulgent smiles, accounts of certain youthful follies (a less pleasant term might be used, but one might as well be out of the world as out of the fashion) of which he was the hero. "Youth must have its fling," they said, with amiable looks, and with a decided disposition to sympathize with youth, if in the course of its fling it was put to any inconvenience.

CHAPTER II.

MR. CHAPPELL SENIOR RECEIVES AN ACCOUNT OF A STRANGE VISITOR.

On a certain morning in May in the year 1870, when the chestnut-trees were in blossom—a circumstance which has nothing whatever to do with this history—Trail, a confidential servant

and what not, who waited upon Mr. Chappell senior during business hours, was awaiting the arrival of his master in the coziest private room of which the bank could boast. Two smaller rooms were accessible only from this private sanctum of the head of the House, and when Mr. Chappell senior was closeted in one of these, his most intimate friend was not allowed to intrude upon his privacy. Possibly he kept his skeleton there. Outside the bank, in the social circle of which he was an ornament, Trail was known as Mr. Reginald Trail, and was a person of some importance, and letters written to him by friends and acquaintances were invariably addressed Reginald Trail, Esq. Once upon a time an esquire was a shield-bearer, bore arms on his escutcheon, and frequently flowered into knight; in these commoner days she may be a greengrocer. Inside the bank Mr. Reginald Trail was a person of no social importance; he was simply Trail. Reginald was out of the question; Mr. equally so; Trail served the purpose well and appropriately.

The room was handsomely and comfortably furnished, and the modern character of the furniture was an indication that the firm of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell was moving with the times. Indeed, within the last ten years, the building in which the bank transacted its business had been entirely rebuilt, and, in notable contradistinction to its former dusty and old wooden appurtenances, was now decorated with marble pillars and polished counters. Every thing in the room was in its proper place. The newspapers were carefully arranged and unfolded, so as to show the Money article; Mr. Chappell's correspondence was on the writing-table in two symmetrical piles; Mr. Chappell's chair was in its usual exact position; and the black-marble clock on the mantel-piece ticked the moments soberly and respectably, as if aware that time was money—as it really is in the matter of interest. The clock marked at this moment ten minutes to eleven.

Although there was no fire in the grate, Trail, from force of habit, stood with his back to the fire-place, and his one disengaged hand stole into its orthodox position under his coat-tails. Trail was meditating upon a letter, which he was regarding with curiosity. Putting his thoughts into words, they run somewhat in this wise:

"You are up to some of your tricks again, Mr. Frederick. I must take the letter, I suppose. What is her name? Laura—simply Miss Laura. Cunning young gentleman! What are my instructions? Miss Laura will be at rehearsal at eleven o'clock, and I am to go to the stage-door, and say that the letter is to be delivered immediately to Miss Laura. I am to wait for an answer. If the young lady herself comes out, and asks questions, I am to lead her to suppose that the letter is from the old gentleman. Very well, very well. Certainly, actresses are remarkably pretty girls. If I were a young man—Never mind; can't eat your pie, and have your pie. I shall go to the theater to-night, and see Master Fred's Miss Laura. Laura—Laura. I had a cousin named"

Trail, having in the course of his musings withdrawn his disengaged hand from his orthodox position, had been handling the letter with busy and curious fingers, and at this point, whether by accident or design, the envelope became unfastened. He looked surprised, and in a tone of gentle remonstrance said:

"Dear me! How careless some persons are in sealing their letters! There can be no harm in looking. H'm! Only two or three lines. 'Mr. Chappell will feel obliged if Miss Laura will call upon him at the bank, at one o'clock this morning, on a matter of importance.' Short, polite, and mysterious," continued Trail, sealing the letter from the gum-bottle. "I thought he was up to one of his tricks again. No business of mine, though. I never trouble my head with other people's affairs. That's the old gentleman's step."

As Mr. Chappell entered the room, the clock struck eleven. Trail put the letter in his

pocket, and submissively received Mr. Chappell's hat and overcoat.

"Has any one called?" asked Mr. Chappell, seating himself at the table, and beginning to open his letters.

"Your son, sir, Mr. Frederick."

"Not for me; he knows that I am never here until eleven o'clock."

"No, sir, not for you; he merely looked in and glanced over the papers."

"Any one else?"

"A young gentleman, who seemed very anxious to see you, sir."

"On business?"

"He did not say, sir. When I told him you would be here at eleven o'clock, he said he would call again. He left that letter" (pointing to a letter which Mr. Chappell had not yet opened), "and his card."

Mr. Chappell glanced at the letter carelessly, and then at the card with closer attention. Above the name written on the card was a rough pen-and-ink sketch of two figures.

"Mr. Richard Barton. I do not know the man. Has he been here before?"

"I have not seen him, sir."

"What do these figures mean?"

Trail looked at the sketch with a properly severe air. It represented a god and goddess, in native costume. As a man with a family, Trail had a proper respect—within limits—for milliners and dressmakers.

"When I asked the gentleman"—

"A gentleman, then?"

"Well, yes, sir; middlingish. When I asked him for his name, he sat down and wrote it upon a blank card, and drew the figures there."

"Saying nothing?"

"Oh, he was very chatable, sir, and very free in his ways. He said first, 'I think I'll wait,' and he sat down for a moment. Then he jumped up, and said, 'I think I'll go.' Then he asked me how old I was, and how many years I had been in the bank; then he asked me if I had ever traveled, and gave a whistle when I said, 'Yes, I've been to Margate.' I asked his pardon, and begged him not to whistle here, and he said he wouldn't till the next time. Then he asked me how I liked not being farther than Margate; and when I said I liked it very well, he whistled again, though I begged him not to. Then he asked me if I could breathe well in London; and I said yes, pretty well, I thanked him. But I beg your pardon, sir, for telling you these things."

"You had better finish, Trail," said Mr. Chappell, with a frown at the card. "An insolent fellow, I should say. Did you not attempt to stop his chattering? This is scarcely the place for such a conversation."

"I told him so, sir; I tried to stop him, but I might as well have tried to stop a windmill by speaking to it. I made bold to try and get rid of him when I found out what he was; but he wouldn't be got rid of. He laughed at me, and poked me in the ribs—he did, sir, though I begged him not to. His manners were very familiar, sir. I don't think he was quite right here"—Trail touched his forehead—"his manners were that familiar. Then, what he said. One thing in one breath, another thing in another. He asked me what I thought of Westminster Abbey; and when I said it was a nice place, he cried, 'It's glorious, glorious, glorious!' Three times, sir, and very excited like. He asked me if I would like to be buried there; I said I had no wish to be buried; and he laughed that loud, though I begged him not to, that I felt ashamed and uncomfortable. He said London was a fine city—then he said it was a dreadful city. He said he would like to live here all his life—then he said he'd like to go away to-morrow."

"Not an Englishman, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir, quite an Englishman, but strange like. He told me what those figures on the card were."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes, sir. He said they were Venus and Bacchus, and asked if they were not good likenesses. I said I had never seen the persons."

Love and jollity he said they were, with another laugh, and was proceeding to go on in exemplification—in exemplification, sir," repeated Trail, with an air of pride, "when I begged him not to; and he didn't, and bid me good-morning, quite affable, and said he would come in again in an hour or so."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Chappell, tossing the card and the letter aside. "The figures are vilely drawn. When he calls, do not show him in."

"Yes, sir."

"He can leave word with you what his business is."

"Very well, sir," said Trail, walking to the door; but suddenly remembering something he had omitted from his budget, he turned back. "Oh, I forgot, sir, in the excitement of this young man. Mr. Armstrong called."

The name did not act as a sedative upon Mr. Chappell's nerves. "What did he want?" he inquired, abruptly.

"He came to know, sir, if we had received any news of the *Golden Mariner*."

Mr. Chappell turned upon Trail with—in that gentleman's opinion—unaccountable irritation.

"And of course you told him there was no news."

"Of course, sir," replied Trail.

"Of course, sir" echoed Mr. Chappell, his irritation increasing. "What do you mean by that?"

"I told him, as you said, sir," said Trail, submissively, "that of course there was no news of the *Golden Mariner*. That is all, sir. This is the third morning that Mr. Armstrong has called to make the same inquiry."

For a moment it appeared as though Mr. Chappell were about to give further vent to his passion, but he controlled himself by a strong effort.

"That will do," he said, more calmly; "you can go. And be good enough to indulge in no more conversations in this room such as you have described."

With a servile bend of the head, fairly indicative of the relationship which exists between English master and English servant, Trail left the room, and Mr. Chappell proceeded to look over and read his correspondence. But his muttered words denoted the uneasiness of his mind.

"Of course there is no news, and he knows that I have underwritten the ship for sixty thousand pounds. Ten weeks out, and not spoken with; but there is plenty of time yet. Even if the worst should have happened, months must elapse, in the absence of authentic intelligence, before I am called upon. What causes people to speak of it already? I heard the rumor for the first time yesterday. Can Armstrong, for reasons of his own, have set it afloat? I hate him—this Armstrong the American, as he takes a pride in calling himself—I hate him, and I tremble before him. Sometimes I have a fear that he suspects my real position—that he sees the precipice upon which I stand. Pshaw! It can be but a fear; there cannot be foundation for it. Yet if the ship be lost, for him a golden haul; for me"—Mr. Chappell paused and covered his eyes with his hand, as though by that action he could see his way more clearly; presently he removed his hand and said, impatiently, "I must not think of it; it unnerves me." His hand at this moment fell upon the letter which Mr. Richard Barton had left for him. Mechanically he opened it and commenced to read listlessly; but he had not read a dozen lines before his listless manner changed to one of eagerness, and his eyes brightened. "What is this?" he cried. "And now we have much pleasure in introducing to your favorable attention a friend and young client of ours, Mr. Richard Barton, one of our most wealthy colonists. We have for many years had large and important transactions with his father, who died but lately, leaving this only son the whole of his property. The young gentleman, contrary to our advice—for landed property here is daily rising in value—insisted upon realizing his estate, and is, to our certain knowledge, worth at least a

hundred thousand pounds. Having been born and educated in the colony, he is an utter stranger in London, and it is with much pleasure we introduce him to you."

The letter was from valued correspondents of the House in Australia, and Mr. Chappell read it a second time with a heightened color in his face.

"Mr. Richard Barton!" he exclaimed. "Why, that's young Venus and Bacchus!" He took up the card again which the young man had left, and examined it with interest. "Beautifully drawn, too! A stranger in London, and a young man!—inexperienced, impulsive, generous probably. A hundred thousand pounds!" He touched the bell, and in his excitement rose, and paced the room. Trail presented himself almost immediately. "Oh, Trail, said Mr. Chappell, "when Mr. Barton calls, do not let him wait. Show him in at once. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied Trail, much mystified by this change, but too good a servant to exhibit astonishment.

"Admit him the moment he arrives." Trail bowed, and closed the door behind him, and Mr. Chappell continued to pace the room. "Good!" he murmured, rubbing his hands.

"Fortune smiles upon me still. This young colonist, with his hundred thousand pounds, will be of use to me. He comes just when he is most needed. I can advise him, speculate for him. At all hazards the credit of the House must be sustained. Great Peruvians fell yesterday one and a-half, and I dare not make a move. Lynx eyes are watching me on every side, and closer than all am I watched by this Armstrong the American, because of the stake he has with me. But time—time is all I want. It is to me what courage is to a soldier, what virtue is to a woman. Peruvians must rise again; the *Golden Mariner* must get safely into port. Yet if it should not—if every chance should melt away—if every hope to which I cling should slip from me into the land of dreams—failure must come, disgrace must come, and then—Tut! tut! I am growing old, and am frightened at every passing cloud. If the world were to see me like this, how low should I fall!" He looked about him fearfully, and wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead; but he could not wrest his thoughts from the gloomy groove into which his fears had driven them, and he sank into his chair with a heavy sigh. "My good name trembles in the balance. It hangs upon a puff of wind—upon a chance rumor—upon a word lightly spoken—and I am hopeless and impotent, trembling at the ghosts which rise from the grave of my ambitious schemes!"

CHAPTER III.

RIGBY, THE HALL-PORTER.

So absorbed was Mr. Chappell in his reflections that he did not hear a soft knock at the door. It was a knock of timidity—a knock deferential and submissive—and it was repeated several times before the sound reached Mr. Chappell's ears; when it did, he raised his head, with the air of one to whom the uncertain and hesitating plea for admission was familiar. He did not reply immediately, and the timid knock was again repeated. Occasionally a man's heart gets into his very knuckles.

"Come in," said Mr. Chappell.

There entered Rigby, the hall-porter of the establishment, whose spare and shrinking figure was familiar to all the customers of the bank. A man who, as he sat upon his stool, pale, and sad, and bent, seemed ever to be wrapped in the retrospection of a life out of which all hope had been crushed long years ago. Between Rigby and his master there could not have been a year's difference in age, but a greater contrast than that which existed between the two men could not well be imagined. Rigby looked at least fifteen years his master's senior; his face was furrowed with wrinkles and deep lines and bore also some marks of dissipation; in his eyes dwelt a spirit of suffering; his clothes were shabby, and his hands were anxiously restless:

altogether a worn and broken man. At the time of his entrance, his features bore an expression of mingled shame and triumph, of humiliation, and of a hope fulfilled which had long been deferred. His lips trembled, and he could scarcely utter the words he attempted to speak.

"Mr. Chappell—sir," he said, and then was silent from agitation.

"Well, Rigby?" replied Mr. Chappell.

"I took the liberty—the liberty, sir"—

Mr. Chappell wheeled his chair suddenly toward the hall-porter, and after a moment's stern observance of him exclaimed in a severe tone:

"I am sorry to see you in this condition, Rigby. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Yes, sir. But you are mistaken; I am not—not drunk, sir."

The laugh to which Mr. Chappell gave utterance plainly expressed his disbelief in his servant's sobriety. The old man's cheek flushed, but in a moment was white again.

"It is true, sir. I am not drunk."

"You have been drinking, and yet are not drunk, eh? That is what you wish me to believe."

"I had one glass before I came in, sir—only one."

The banker, sleek and smooth, carefully dressed and trim, a church-going man who occupied one of the best pews (which pews are nearest to heaven, I wonder?)—in brief, a gentleman, as all the world and his wife knew and acknowledged—threw himself back in his arm-chair, and laughed again—a laugh which would have raised the anger of any person but one thoroughly crushed and broken down. All that Rigby did in response was to raise his hand, feebly and despondingly, as though to ward off a blow, and to plead timidly.

"You may believe me, sir, you may indeed."

"As I have believed you before, eh, Rigby, and with the same result?"

"No, sir; I know my failings, notwithstanding that I have been unable to conquer them. I had one little drop of brandy to give me courage. I was compelled to take it. I should not have been able to stand in your presence, and say what I have to say, without it. You ask me if I am not ashamed of myself. I am, sir. But I have been ashamed and disgraced for many years, and if it had not been for a little brandy now and then, I should not have been able to bear my load. I should have gone mad."

"You would wish me to believe, I suppose," said Mr. Chappell, in an insolent and accustomed tone of superiority, "that it was a good and a wise thing for you to take a drink?"

"It was neither good nor wise, sir," replied Rigby, very humbly. "I do not wish you to believe anything, sir—that is" (correcting himself quickly) "anything it displeases you to believe. If there is a difference of opinion between us on any point—pardon me, sir, for placing myself by your side even in this way—you must be right and I wrong. I know it, to my shame and sorrow. Our lives are the best proofs of it."

"That I am right and you are wrong on this particular point could not be more evident than it is," said Mr. Chappell, complacently. "Why, look at the difference between us—you seem old enough to be my father."

"Yet, sir, we were born in the same year, and went to the same school, if you will pardon me." (Mr. Chappell received the record of this coincidence with a lofty motion of the hand, which expressed: "There really are some circumstances in our lives for which we are not accountable.") Rigby proceeded: "I wish to speak to you on a matter of importance."

"Be as brief as you can, Rigby."

"I will, sir." The old man placed his hand on the back of a chair, to steady himself; he was in a state of great agitation, and his words did not come freely. "May I beg of you to carry your mind back to a time—ah, how many years ago!—when you, I, and my brother"—

Mr. Chappell interrupted him with a strang-

fierceness. "How dare you refer to him, Rigby?" he cried. "How dare you?"

"I doubt if I should have had the courage to do so, sir," replied Rigby, meekly, "if I had not taken a glass of brandy. Now you can understand why I did it, sir. But I must say what I have come to say."

"Go on, then," said Mr. Chappell haughtily.

"Well, sir, at that time we three young men—you, I, and my brother—were fellow-clerks in this bank. We were all equal then—were equally trusted—were equally ambitious to rise—and had equal chances in the world. I had my day-dreams, then, sir; I built my castles, if you will deign to remember, for we sometimes talked together of the future. My castles soon dissolved—yours were built upon a surer foundation. Yet I have since thought that mine might have proved to be something more than air had a dread misfortune not fallen upon me. I loved my brother, and he loved me, I think. Whatever good fortune came to either of us, the other was to share. In my mind, at that time, there was no one comparable to my brother—shrewd, clever, and good, as we believed, I saw his future clear and bright before him. You know how it all turned out, sir."

"Shamefully! shamefully!" exclaimed Mr. Chappell.

"As you say, sir, shamefully, shamefully! One fatal day—fatal to me and to my hopes, fatal to him and his ambition—defalcations were discovered in his department, and shortly afterward he stood in a felon's dock, charged with embezzling money of the bank. The evidence against him was clear, and he was transported for life."

"Disgraceful circumstance!"

"It was, so, sir; and his offense was aggravated by his after conduct."

"In what way, Rigby," inquired Mr. Chappell, with the air of one who had but an indistinct recollection of the details.

"In this very room—you were not present, sir, and may not have heard of it, although it was known to many—the head of the House offered to pardon my brother, or rather not to prosecute him, if he would make a full and free confession of the crime. I begged him to accept the merciful offer. He replied with a strange and bitter laugh, that he had nothing to confess, and the police were called in. What became of the money no one knew, and he refused to tell. He did not drink, he did not gamble"—

"So far as we know, Rigby," interrupted Mr. Chappell, in gentle correction. "A man may have vices which he conceals from his friends."

"It is true, sir. He might have speculated, hoping to win a fortune quickly, when he could replace the money. It was a large sum, sir, if you remember. But no word ever fell from his lips that gave a clue as to how it was disposed of. At that time he was engaged to a girl whose father's circumstances were not good, but it is certain that they did not benefit by his crime."

Again, Mr. Chappell gently interposed.

"Can we be certain of that? Does my memory serve me aright when I say that this girl disappeared shortly after the trial? Or is it a fancy? There were so many rumors afloat."

"You are correct, sir; the girl did disappear after the trial, but she may have been glad to fly from a spot fraught with such bitter memories. I think that she and her father were ignorant of the crime until my brother was arrested."

"We never know, Rigby, we never know. It is so easy to assume a semblance of innocence. Do we not see this every day of our lives?"

"You are right, sir, unfortunately. But I have never forgotten the despair and agony of the poor girl when she came to know if the news was true. She had a sincere love for him—but all who knew him loved him. They could not help it, his nature was so frank, so generous"—

The cold look which Mr. Chappell cast upon him checked him here; he corrected himself

swiftly, and with increased humbleness proceeded:

"I am not pleading for him, sir; I have nothing to say in extenuation. He wrecked his own happiness—hers—mine—and I, his brother, admit that his punishment was just. He was banished for life from the country in which he hoped to win a name and position; I remained, broken down by his crime and his disgrace—for who would associate with the brother of a felon?—and you, sir, the only one of the three, rose, as you deserved to rise, and became the head of the House which my brother and I, through him, had wronged."

"My good Rigby," said Mr. Chappell, in a softened tone, and with a gracious wave of his hand, in token that his servant had amply atoned for his previous warmth.

"After the trial," proceeded Rigby, "the principals consulted as to their course of action with respect to me. I understood that no suspicion existed in their minds that I was implicated in my brother's crime; others were not as just in their opinions. But although the partners might not have suspected me, I was a disgraced man, and they decided that they could not retain my services. I was on the point of being dismissed from the bank with deserved ignominy, when, in charitable memory of old times, you begged that I should not be thrown upon the world. At your intercession the partners were merciful. It was impossible that I should be allowed to remain in a position of trust, where money would pass through my hands. They removed me from the office desk and gave me the position of hall-porter."

"Which you have held ever since," observed Mr. Chappell, cheerfully.

"Which I have held ever since, as you say, sir. Which I might hold, I have no doubt, until death took the poor hall-porter from your bank door. I have come now, sir, to resign that situation."

Mr. Chappell sat bolt upright in his chair, in astonishment.

"Resign, Rigby!" he exclaimed. "Nay, nay, I am perfectly satisfied with you. If I have spoken irritably to you lately—I have been much worried, and I may have done so unconsciously—forget it, and do not do a foolish thing. You must not throw yourself upon the world at your age. Think better of it. You are not yourself just now."

"I have thought well over it, sir; I place my resignation in your hands, and I hope you will find a faithful man to fill my place."

Mr. Chappell shrugged his shoulders. "You know best, I suppose. How are you to live?"

"That is provided for, sir."

"Well," said Mr. Chappell, in a tone of indifference, "if it must be, it must be. You have good reasons, doubtless, for your action."

"I have, sir."

The banker turned to his papers with a busy air, as though the matter was settled, and the interview at an end. But Rigby still lingered, waiting for Mr. Chappell to give him his attention.

"You have said all you have to say, I presume," observed Mr. Chappell presently, in the midst of his occupation.

"No, sir. There is something more, if you will kindly hear me."

"Be speedy, then; I am busy."

"I will not detain you long, sir. I want you to believe that I have never forgotten your kindness to me. After my brother left this country, a felon, I had but one purpose in life—to repay the money he had embezzled, and thus redeem, in some measure, the honor of our family—for it was an honored name, as you know, sir, until that fatal time."

It was impossible for Mr. Chappell to assume indifference in presence of the simple earnestness of his old servant's words and manner, and it was in a kinder and more sympathetic tone that he said:

"Nay, nay, my good Rigby, do not say anything more on the subject. It is buried and forgotten."

"It is neither, sir," responded Rigby, sol-

emnly. "Shame sleeps sometimes, but never dies. We cannot bury it out of sight. It rises from the grave like the ghost of remorse, and compels us to look into its eyes. In the dead of night, when no sound can be heard, when no being can be seen, it steals to our side, and whispers to us. I have heard it—I have heard it! I have seen it, with darkness all around me. My brother's shame cast its shadow over me, and made me—what I am. Condemned to bear the burden of this shame, with all eyes gazing at me, I was strengthened by one intense and earnest desire; a desire to pay the debt, if I may be pardoned for calling it so. Animated by this resolve, I pinched, I lived sparsely, I almost starved myself to save. But what could I lay by out of the wages of a hall-porter? It would have needed ten lifetimes to save the money. I was in despair; but still I contrived to save a little—a very little—and had the intention of leaving it to the bank when I died. Suddenly, as though in answer to my prayers, help has come—how and from whom I am not at liberty to say; and before twenty-four hours have passed over my head—this very morning, perhaps—I shall be able to pay into your hands the sum which my brother embezzled."

Mr. Chappell reflected in silence upon this unexpected statement. The money would be useful to him, but the manner of acquiring it was so strange, and he had, in truth, been so much affected by his old servant's story, that he was moved to an act of magnanimity—for it was magnanimous even to jeopardize, by a few words so easily not spoken, the receipt of this unexpected windfall.

"There is no occasion for the payment of the money," he said; "it is not you who owe it. Besides, the debt is canceled—it was written off the books a score of years ago."

"But it is not written off my heart!" cried Rigby, with fierce eagerness. "Do you think I have not suffered during my service to the bank? Do you think I can enjoy peace, if it ever come to me, until the bank books show that there is nothing standing against the name I bear, and until it is known that I, a broken-down old man, have wasted my life in endeavoring to make reparation? If you will not receive the money, I will take it to the counter and pay it in, as, having the means, I would pay any just debt. I will not be robbed of what is my due! There are men in the bank at this present time who were boys when we were boys, and who know the story of my disgrace. They have talked of it to their wives and children, over their fireside; they have whispered it about in public places. I have not heard them, but the words which never reached my ears have burned their way into my heart! I have been pointed out to the young clerks as the man whose brother robbed the bank. The lads avoid my look; they shrink from me, whispering to each other, as a creature unworthy of association. I must be cleared of this—I can endure it no longer! I must be able to look these youngsters in the face, and say to them, 'I have atoned for my brother's crime by the wreck of my ambition, of my happiness, of all my dearest hopes. Pay me now the respect which is my due!'"

The pent-up passion of the man was a wonderful revelation. It was as though all his life he had been compelled to keep it under restraint, and now for the first time could give it free play. But it had a singularly distinctive characteristic of its own in the circumstance that the man never once raised his voice above its ordinary level—due, doubtless, to long habits of humbleness on his part. Again Mr. Chappell paused before replying, and it was perhaps from a motive of delicacy that when he did speak, he averted his eyes from the hall-porter's face.

"Very well, Rigby," he said: "let it be as you have decided."

All the eager fire died out of the old man's manner; all his passion was gone.

"Thank you, sir, humbly," he said, meekly, "for this and all your other kindnesses."

He was shuffling away, when Mr. Chappell's voice arrested his steps.

"When do you wish to leave, Rigby?"

"Soon—soon. This week if you can find a person to fill my place."

"I know of one. You can leave to-morrow."

"It is like you," said Rigby, with a grateful bend of the head; "ever kind, ever considerate."

Mr. Chappell rose, and held out his hand to his old servant. Rigby gazed at it for a moment, in doubt whether this mark of courtesy and sympathy was intended for him. The next moment he took the hand, and bowed over it; then, with a proud and grateful sob, as though the simple action repaid him for all his years of shame and suffering, he left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

RICHARD BARTON PRESENTS HIMSELF.

As recalling a remarkable incident presumably long forgotten, it was natural that this interview should leave a powerful impression upon Mr. Chappell's mind. It was natural, also, that the thoughts which it engendered should be of a melancholy nature. To be suddenly wrested from the realities of the present to the contemplation of a time in the dim past, when life was at its fairest, and when the pulses were quickened by hopeful anticipation, is something of a shock to a man. Great philosophy or strong faith is required to enable one to bear such a shock with equanimity or resignation. Mr. Chappell was remarkable for neither, and his contemplation of the past was in its nature most melancholy and sad. And yet he had been a successful man. In his youth he had thirsted for wealth and position; he had gained both, and after the first flush of enjoyment, all the light and color had died out of them. Pride was still left to him, but the pleasure which is comprised in this affection has little of sweetness in it.

A slip of paper which Rigby had left upon the table attracted Mr. Chappell's attention. He remembered that Rigby had placed it there, and had made no reference to it; there was writing on it which he had glanced at carelessly, but his attention had been diverted from it at the time. Now he took it up and read it; the words were few, and were simply to the effect that on the 15th of May of the year 1870 there would be paid to the firm of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell the sum of two thousand eight hundred and twenty-two pounds, in settlement of a liability incurred in May, 1836.

"There must be some mistake," thought Mr. Chappell, touching the bell; "the sum was but twelve hundred pounds. Bring me," he said to the clerk whom he had summoned, "the ledger for the year 1836, letter D."

In a few minutes the clerk entered with the ledger, and Mr. Chappell, opening it, found the record of the embezzlement—an exact sum of twelve hundred pounds, duly written off, and consigned to the limbo of the profit and loss account. With his finger upon the record, the sight of which brought a frown to his face, he considered for a little while, and then, taking a book from one of the drawers of his writing-table, turned to the interest tables. He found what he searched for. Twelve hundred pounds at four per cent. simple interest for thirty-four years, swelled to the exact sum of two thousand eight hundred and thirty-two pounds.

"And Rigby has been scheming all his life to repay this money," he thought; "singular infatuation!"

The money really would be useful to him, great banker as he was. He had been speculating heavily lately, having moved with the times, and he was in some fear as to the result of his speculations. He would have justified himself readily enough to any one who questioned the wisdom of his conduct, if any person had been in his confidence. The House of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell could not afford to be left behind in the race which all the world was running. If it desired to hold its place and not be jostled aside, it must move with the times, and moving with the times meant speculation, increased risks, the keeping up of a greater establishment than had hitherto been deemed necessary. For Mr. Chappell had

a grand and fashionable lady for his wife, who also felt it to be her imperative duty to move with the times.

So many common persons had grown rich within the last few years, and were spending their money lavishly in ostentatious display that it behooved a lady in Mrs. Chappell's position—a position to which she had been born, and which she had not filched, as it were—to teach these presumptuous persons a lesson, and to show them they could not have it all their own way. Not very long since, Mr. Mercer had bought the lease of a house immediately adjoining hers, and was now living there with his family in great style, giving magnificent and frequent entertainments, and receiving the best in the land. Six years ago Mrs. Mercer kept a milliner's shop, and was glad of Mrs. Chappell's custom. Mr. Mercer had made his money by speculation, and now his wife somewhat looked down upon Mrs. Chappell, and took a pride in eclipsing her in the Park and in the drawing-room. This was not to be quietly borne. Mr. Chappell, who was ruled by his wife, agreed with her, and agreed with her also in the declaration that the firm of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell had done a great deal for the country, by its name and unblemished reputation, to say nothing of its vast monetary operations, and that it was high time its principal representative received a baronetcy. The accomplishment of this ambitious desire required expenditure; political influence was necessary, and political influence could not be acquired by one who kept his purse-strings closed.

Never in the world's history was money more potent than in the present decade; it simply accomplished all things, and with fair tact and perseverance, and a certain amount of effrontery, could purchase all things. This fact was recognized by Mrs. Chappell, and it was probably owing to confidential outpourings of her soul upon this subject to her husband that he had drifted into speculation. Certainly there was no doubting his wife's declaration, that no persons had a right to hold their heads higher in society than those who represented the House of Chappell, Chappell and Chappell. This, in brief, was the position of affairs at the opening of this history.

On Mr. Chappell's writing-table was a later edition of the *Times* than that he had perused over his breakfast-table at home. He looked through the paper for fresh items of news, and soon lighted upon one which he read with feverish haste:

"THE GOLDEN MARINER.—Certain rumors with reference to the safety of this ship have been flying about the city during the last day or two. Upon inquiry we find there is not the slightest foundation for them. The vessel is not yet due at its destination, and there is no cause for alarm in the circumstance that she has not been spoken with. The rumors have most probably been circulated by insurance speculators; it is difficult otherwise to account for them. The cargo of the *Golden Mariner* is exceptionally valuable, but that is not a reasonable ground for fears regarding the safety of the vessel, which is one of the finest now afloat."

Mr. Chappell read these lines with intense satisfaction, and a sigh of relief escaped him as he laid the paper aside.

"Certainly there is no cause for fear," he mused, "notwithstanding Mr. Armstrong's anxious inquiries. This morning promises to be a fortunate one."

There was still one letter unopened, and he turned his attention to it. His sparkling eyes proved the truth of the adage that it never rains but it pours.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "From Mr. Wakefield. An invitation to stand for Burlingham; Conservative representative not expected to live many hours. Sharp work—but Wakefield is a shrewd man, always takes time by the forelock. It must be done; it will cost money, but the chance must not be lost. Wakefield is a safe man, too; his judgment is sound. I will con-

sult Mrs. Chappell. Member of Parliament for Burlingham!"

He leaned back in his chair, and indulged in pleasant anticipation, with a smile on his lips. For a second time this morning he did not hear a knock at his door. There was but slight excuse for his not hearing it, for the knock was a loud one; there was something cheerful and bustling in the sound. It was not repeated. The door was opened, and a young gentleman entered, and it was not until he was fairly in the room, and was speaking, that Mr. Chappell was aware of the intrusion.

"I expect you did not hear my knock," said the intruder, in a brisk, confident tone, "so I took the liberty"—

"It is a liberty, sir," interrupted Mr. Chappell, haughtily. "You should have spoken to the attendant outside."

"No one there, I assure you; but if it is a liberty, I'll say good morning, and go away. First, though—are you Mr. Chappell?"

"I am, sir. And you?"

"My name is Richard Barton. I left a letter"—

"My dear sir," cried Mr. Chappell, rising in haste, and cordially holding out his hand, "a thousand thousand pardons! I am delighted to see you—delighted to see you!"

CHAPTER V.

RICHARD BARTON BEGINS TO MAKE FRIENDS.

"WELCOME to London, my dear sir, welcome to London!" continued Mr. Chappell, before his visitor had time to utter another word. "I am ashamed to have given you so much trouble."

"Don't mention it," said Richard Barton, seeming at a loss to know what trouble was referred to. "No trouble, I assure you."

"Pray sit down. A thousand welcomes. Mrs. Chappell will be charmed to know you—charmed."

He gazed at his visitor with such an expression as might come to one whose cup of happiness was filled to the brim. Richard Barton was delighted with his reception, and shook the banker's hand cordially again and again. The entrance of this young man was like a puff of fresh country air in a place which had been pent up for years. There was nothing of city life about him—neither craft, nor despondency, nor care. His sun-browned, handsome face sparkled with pleasurable excitement; his clear, outspoken, brown eyes beamed with honesty—nature dwelt in them. His features were emphatically laughing features. He had a trick of looking pleasant, which was natural to him. His was a face which women and children would trust instinctively.

"Well, now," he said, "this is hearty of you; I like you."

"That is right, my dear sir," rejoined Mr. Chappell, with a frank smile; "we want you to like us. We'll make you like us more before we've done with you."

"Why," exclaimed Richard Barton, "until this morning I was beginning to think that I had traveled sixteen thousand miles over the sea to be frozen into an icicle of conventional politeness, and to have every drop of cordiality squeezed clean out of me. Tell me—do you see anything strange in my manner?"

"On the contrary, my dear sir, on the contrary."

"Then what on earth makes people stare at me so? I go into a shop to purchase something, and directly I make a remark to the shop-man, the other persons in the shop turn and stare at me. If I smile at them, they shrug their shoulders and turn away again. I look pleasantly at a man in the crowd, with an idea that he would like me to do so, and he scowls ferociously at me in return. I tread upon a gentleman's toe by accident, and when I apologize to him he swears at me. The uncivilized bears! And I was led to expect something so different; I was told that the people here were most polished, and that it was I who would be found to be rough and uncivilized. 'You must be on your best

behavior,' said a friend to me over the water; 'you must mind your p's and q's.' I have had one or two experiences, though, for I have delayed rather in delivering my letter of introduction to you. I have been in London a week. I wanted to taste the sensation of being in a great city where there were hundreds of thousands of people, and where your very name was not known. Would you like to hear one of my pleasant experiences!"

"I shall be delighted."

"Well—Ha! ha! ha! I can't help laughing, for the life of me, when I think of it. I've had my pocket picked."

Mr. Chappell could not exactly understand what pleasure there could be in this reminiscence; but as he was anxious to please and conciliate his visitor, he smiled, as if he really saw in it.

"The cleverest trick," continued Richard Barton. "I was walking along the Strand quite comfortably, when a gentleman tapped me on the shoulder. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'but this is your handkerchief, I believe.' It was mine, and I took it from him somewhat abruptly. 'A young rascal,' he said, not noticing my rudeness, 'was picking it from your pocket when I snatched it from his hand. He made off at once. These common pick-pockets know how to make good use of their heels.' He raised his hat, and almost before I had time to thank him and apologize he turned down a street, and I lost sight of him. I was sorry for it, for I felt that I had behaved uncivilly. Then comes a policeman—By-the-way, did you ever see a London policeman smile?"

"I have never remarked it."

"They do smile sometimes, I suppose, when nobody's looking. Well, then comes a policeman, and points to my watch-chain. It was hanging loose. I clapped my hand to my waist-coat pocket, to find that my watch was gone. The clever rascal—quite a gentleman, I assure you—had first taken my handkerchief from my pocket, and while he handed it back to me, stole my watch. Sharp trick, wasn't it? Upon my word, I've almost made up my mind if I meet him again, to make him a present of the chain."

"Certainly," thought Mr. Chappell, when he heard the adventure related as a pleasant experience, "this young gentleman is an oddity, and requires a friend."

"You have had other pleasant adventures, you say," he observed with a slight cough.

"Not adventures—experiences." But here Richard Barton blushed, and said, "Ah, well, perhaps I had better not tell you. You will only laugh at me. You won't? It's only a face."

"A face!"

"There! I ought not to have spoken of it. Why not, though? There is no harm in it. It was a face I saw in a theatre."

"A girl's face, of course," observed Mr. Chappell, with an indulgent smile.

"Yes, a girl's face, fair and beautiful."

"Dangerous places, the theatres—filled with sirens. Beware of them."

"This one is no siren," said Richard Barton, in a soft tone, "in the sense that you mean. She is as good as she is beautiful; I am sure of it. You will understand me better when I tell you that I lost my mother when I was very young, and that I have but a dim, sweet remembrance of her face. This girl's face resembles hers. That is all. I hope you will not think me foolish for mentioning so trivial a circumstance."

"Think you foolish, my dear sir!" exclaimed Mr. Chappell, with ready sympathy, pressing his visitor's hand warmly. "Your sentiments do you honor. As a father, I am proud to hear them from the lips of a young man."

"Thank you," said Richard Barton, simply and quietly; "I am glad you did not laugh at me."

Mr. Chappell changed the subject. "Then you begin to like London, after all?"

"I am not quite sure. There are a great many people in it, but they are all strangers. Do you ever find it lonely?"

"Lonely! Why, the streets are crowded! Where you come from?"

"Ay, where I come from, the streets compared to your London streets, are deserted. Yet here I walk among the crowd, and feel lonely, devilish lonely. Where I come from it is, 'How are you, Dick?' 'Good day, Barton.' 'Fine morning, old boy!' and I receive the grip of a friend's hand every hundred yards—hands with hearts in them, mind you. But here nobody gives anybody a pleasant look; everybody looks upon every other body as an interloper, as something to be hustled about and pushed aside; everybody is in every other body's way. Why, to me the very houses seem to be jealous of their neighbors, and to be poking their elbows into each other's ribs. I am glad to be here, though. I wanted to look with my own eyes upon St. Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, and Hampton Court, and the Crystal Palace, and all the other wonders, so that I might be able to talk of them by-and-by. I wanted to see the theatres and the great actors I've read so much about. I would give much for the privilege of shaking by the hand some great authors whom I could name, and for the opportunity of thanking them for the many hours they have made pleasant for me. I want to see if they are like their works. But they must be, they must be; they could not write else. Do you know any of them, sir?"

"Yes, and so will you when you mix in society." (Mr. Chappell had it on his lips to say, "You will find them very ordinary persons, after all," but he thought it wiser not to attempt to dispel the young man's illusions. He had a feeling of both admiration and contempt for his visitor's freshness.) "Mrs. Chappell will be most happy to study your wishes in this respect. You will come to my house to-morrow evening to dinner—a few friends after—a little music—quite a simple affair. My wife will be delighted; she has a passion for celebrities, and I dare say one or two lions will drop in in the course of the evening. Then my son Frederick will show you about; he knows every inch of London. I shall not wonder to hear you say, after a little while, that it is the only city in the world worth living in."

"I am sure I am quite ready to think so; it has brightened considerably since I have been in this room. Now, what do you think I came to London for?"

Somewhat surprised at the question, after the young man's enthusiastic outburst, Mr. Chappell replied, "To see its wonders, and to enjoy life as a young man of means should do."

"No," said Richard Barton, with a different kind of earnestness; there were both sorrow and sternness in his tones now. "Notwithstanding what I have said, it is doubtful whether I should have crossed the seas, but for one other settled and specific purpose. Born in the colonies, and living the free life many men lead there, I think I should have been content there to live and die. It is only Englishmen who yearn for England, and it is right they should. Four-fifths of those who are now in the colonies speak of the Old Country as home, simply for the reason that they were born here, and thousands look forward to the time when they will be able to return. This feeling is growing weaker, certainly, every year, and is not shared in at all by us who were born in the fair South. We taste pleasures that you in crowded cities do not dream of. No; I have come to England to perform a task in which justice made a slight mistake; but a mistake which blighted the hopes of a life. When I send in my card to the person I am in search of, it will not be embellished with the figures of Venus and Bacchus. In the performance of my task I may ask for your assistance."

"You may depend upon it, my dear sir," said Mr. Chappell, cheerfully; "you may depend upon it."

"Thank you. In the mean time, as I do not wish my money to lie idle, I shall be glad to take your advice in the matter of investments."

"I shall be most happy to give it," replied Mr. Chappell, rubbing his hands.

While these last words were being exchanged, a short dialogue was taking place outside the door, Frederick Chappell, Mr. Chappell's eldest son, had sauntered into the hall, and before entering the room, paused to exchange a few words with Trail. Mr. Frederick justified the confidence which the young clerks of the bank placed in him in the matter of dress. He was the very pink of fashion, a model of ease and elegance. A handsome young gentleman also, with fair hair scrupulously arranged, and the skin as white and smooth as a lady's. Somewhat of a contrast to the young gentleman now closeted with his father: Richard Barton had brown hair and an embrowned skin, and was nothing of a dandy.

"My father in, Trail?" asked the young exquisite.

"Yes, sir."

A shadow expressive of disappointment passed into the young man's face.

"There's a gentleman with him, sir," proceeded Trail; "a singular gentleman—very singular. From foreign parts, I believe."

This being a matter of small importance to Frederick Chappell, he made no comment on it. With his hand upon the handle of the door, he was about to enter the room, but paused to say carelessly.

"You delivered my letter?"

"To the young lady, Miss Laura, sir—Oh, yes."

"Did you see the young lady herself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was there any answer to the letter?"

These questions were put in a tone of utter indifference.

"The young lady seemed surprised, sir, but she said she would come."

"Very good. Seemed surprised? What else did she say, then?"

"Nothing else, sir. I meant she look surprised."

Frederick Chappell nodded, and again was on the point of entering the room; but although he made a show of turning the handle, it remained motionless within his hand.

"Oh, by-the-way, Trail," said Frederick Chappell, as though about to say something of little importance which had accidentally escaped him, "if she happens to call when my father is in, you will say that he is busy. If I am in, you will admit her. You understand?"

Trail's understanding being strengthened through his palm by contact with a piece of silver, he replied that he understood, and added that the young lady had said she might be a few minutes late, as she had a long rehearsal to go through. Then Frederick Chappell turned the handle of the door and entered the room.

"Ah, here is my son," said the banker. "Let me introduce you to each other. Frederick, this is Mr. Richard Barton, just arrived from the colonies, with a pocketful of money, and in sad need of a friend to pioneer him through the mysterious labyrinths of London life. I want you youngsters to be friends."

The young men shook hands.

"With such an introduction," said Frederick, with a light laugh, "I shall be very happy to be Mr. Barton's guide, philosopher, and friend."

"That's right, that's right," said the banker, briskly. "Mr. Barton is quite a stranger in London, unused to London ways and manners, which are somewhat strange to him. You must show him about, Fred."

"I shall be very happy to do so," replied Frederick, airily. "What do you say? Shall I be your courier? A kind of index, to which you shall refer in all your difficulties? You must provide me with a proper uniform."

"No, no," cried Richard Barton, laughing, "a friend in real, right-down earnest. That's what I want, and shall be glad of."

"It's a bargain, then. If I am to be your mentor, I should dub you Telemachus."

"Let me see," observed Richard Barton, with a certain air of thoughtfulness upon him. "Telemachus was advised to go to Sparta to seek information of his father. Well, I shall want assistance. We are friends, then."

a cordial look toward Frederick Chappell. "It is a bargain."

"Though," observed Frederick, "you have no need to desire friends while your pockets are lined with gold. That guarantees you a welcome everywhere. Friends will fly to you like iron to a magnet, and will stick to you as close while the attraction lasts."

"That is true in many senses," said Richard Barton, somewhat sententiously; "it is the way of the world, I know."

"There's no danger of Mr. Barton losing his attraction," said the banker, entering into the humor of the conversation; "he has too much of it."

"Can't have, dad. I wish I were in his place. Look." With an air of comical distress, he pulled out the lining of an empty pocket, and extended it for observation between two fingers. "For the credit of my name you might give me some money, dad. If I were to be searched it would be a lasting disgrace to the House, for I haven't a shilling."

"You forget," interposed Richard Barton, "that I have a pocketful."

"No, I don't. I'll borrow of you by-and-by."

At which all the gentlemen laughed in concert. Mr. Chappell senior sat down and wrote a check, and gave it to his son, saying good-humoredly,

"Here, you extravagant scamp."

"Thank you, dad. Now my mind is easy. If all fathers were like you, and all sons like me, what a happy world this would be!"

"For the sons," replied the banker, dryly. "You lads can amuse yourselves, I have no doubt. I have business elsewhere. Help me on with my coat, Fred. Good-day, Mr. Barton. You will excuse me. Do not forget to come to-morrow evening. Make my house your home while you are here. We dine at six, and you will always find a knife and fork ready."

And with these and other words as cordial, Mr. Chappell senior, shaking hands with Richard Barton, and bestowing upon him many a kindly look, took his departure, and hailing a cab, was whirled in the direction of the Stock Exchange.

CHAPTER VI.

FREDERICK CHAPPELL AIRS HIS VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT OF "WOMAN."

FREDERICK CHAPPELL was by no means inclined to disregard an introduction, under such favorable circumstances, to a wealthy, inexperienced, and impulsively generous young gentleman. Some two or three years older than Richard Barton, he was immeasurably older in experience in the world's ways and wiles, in all that savored of life's wisdom. He had matriculated in the crooked paths, and was learned in them. When he said he would borrow of Richard Barton by-and-by, he made the statement in all sincerity. He was not averse to borrowing, being nearly always in need, notwithstanding the handsome allowance his father made him. To be in debt did not trouble him; it was fashionable. He owed with an easy mind—the very reverse of Richard Barton, with whom to owe what he had not present expectancy of paying would have been torture. But I need not proceed with my analysis; the characters of these young men and of others in this story will be developed by themselves, through their words and actions. Having an hour to spare, Frederick Chappell was quite willing to devote it to his new friend.

The first thing he did when his father left them was to examine the outside of Richard Barton with a critical eye.

"What tailor is responsible?" he asked.

"For my clothes?" replied Richard Barton, who noticed the observance, and was amused by it. "They were made in the colonies."

"I thought so; they are vile, outlandish."

"Don't abuse my native land," said Richard, with a smile; "I am much attached to it."

"I am ready to believe that it is the happiest spot under the sun; but they can't cut trowsers

and coats there. Abuse your native land I will not; abuse your tailor I must."

"Are they so bad?" asked Richard, looking at his despised garments.

"My dear fellow, you must not go into society with such surroundings. You have a position to maintain. I shall take you to my tailor, who will make a man of you. Where are you stopping?"

"At a hotel."

"Bad form. You intend to stay in London?"

"For some time at least. Twelve months say."

"Probability is, if you stay twelve, you will stay twelve twelves. I make an appointment with you. To-morrow at twelve we go to my tailor."

"Can I exist till that time?"

"Try. It's a bore I know. Any special grief on your mind?"

"A terrible one—just fledged." Richard struck his breast dramatically. "Have been hatching it all my life, and it has only now popped its head out. A grief full-feathered."

"Confide in me, Telemachus."

"I ask you," said Richard, with a sly smile, "can I exist until twelve to-morrow to be made a man of?"

"I will help you—with my society."

"Do. Heaven knows what will occur to me if I am thrown upon the burden of myself, with this new grief to weigh me down."

Richard Barton was evidently devoid neither of animal spirits nor a certain kind of humor; and Frederick Chappell was disposed to be tolerant of any eccentricity in one so well accredited.

"Be consoled," he said, as he lolled in his father's arm-chair; "I will come to you this afternoon, we will dine together, and go to the theater afterward. Agreed to?"

"With pleasure."

"Ever been behind the scenes?"

"Never," replied Richard, eagerly.

"I will take you," said Frederick, calmly.

"We will go and see the mysteries and the glories of the new burlesque, 'Mythology in a Stew.' I'll introduce you to the author, with whom you will be disappointed, and to the actress who plays the leading part, with whom you will be enchanted. I promise—what with grandees in paste, and milkmaids, and feathers and silk tights and high-heeled boots, and other modern pleasantries, to say nothing of a deficiency of drapery—to show you a very pretty congregation of sinners. I will tell them you are worth a million a year, and they will all worship you. They will prostrate themselves before your Moneyed Highness, and lick the dust from your feet."

Richard Barton, delighted at the programme prepared for him, laughed heartily at his companion's vivaciousness, which, it must be stated, was displayed only in the matter, and not at all in the manner, of his words. On occasions such as this, Frederick Chappell affected a slight drawl, though he could be earnest enough when occasion demanded.

"You have been to the theater, of course?" he asked.

"Oh yes, but not to see the burlesque you speak of. I have been to two or three. On the first night I was in London I went to see a new modern comedy, and I must confess to being somewhat surprised at its tone. Everybody said sharp and unkind things of everybody else. It was as though an assembly of cynics were speaking, who had no belief in goodness. All that was best in human nature was set up as a target, at which every actor in the play shot arrows of ridicule and derision. The people in the theater seemed amused, certainly, for they laughed and applauded; and a lady near to me observed more than once to her companion, 'How splendidly epigrammatic!' It did not strike me in that way, I must confess. As for the drawing-room conversation, I expect if such were indulged in in society off the stage the speakers would be shown to the door with very scant ceremony."

"My dear fellow, in society we are never

rude. We do unkind things occasionally, but they are always done politely. You have made me almost forget our to-morrow's appointment. At twelve, then, to the tailor, to be made a man of; afterward to look at some chambers I know of. They are in Pall Mall, and will suit you exactly. They are very close to my own set."

"You don't live at home, then?"

"Occasionally; not as a rule. Can't be bored. We will drop in upon a friend of mine on the way—one Armstrong, an American. Eccentric fellow, Armstrong. Americans go in for eccentricity, it seems to me—especially rich ones. Look at Peabody. But money covereth a multitude of sins, social and other, and Armstrong is as rich as Croesus."

"A common mistake that, I take it. Croesus was not a rich man."

"Nonsense."

"Not nonsense. Come, now; a syllogism. What man is rich?"

"That man who has enough money."

"Has a man enough who is not contented? Fair play, now."

"Of course he hasn't," replied Frederick, a little surlily, seeing the trap.

"Croesus was not content. Therefore Croesus was not a rich man. A man with fifty pounds a year and content is richer than Croesus was with all his millions."

"A colonial philosopher, by Jove!" cried Frederick, with just a shade of sarcasm in his tone. "You will be a success—when you are properly dressed. I prophesy that in a month from this day you will be one of the chief lions in London. All the girls will be running wild after you."

"What for? my philosophy?"

"No," said Frederick, with a laugh. "Your money."

"All the girls?"

"Every man Jack—I beg their pardon, every woman Jill of them."

Richard Barton did not reply immediately. Some cynical chord in his companion's manner jarred upon his nerves. When he spoke it was slowly, and in a soft tone.

"I don't believe in flippant expressions toward women. That kind of talk is too common nowadays, unfortunately."

"Verdant youth!" thought Frederick; but he did not utter his thought aloud.

"You will not mind my saying this, I hope," proceeded Richard, earnestly. "Put it down to my having lived out of the great world, or to my being old-fashioned."

"All right, old fellow," said Frederick, with easy condescension. "You will know better after you have been in London a few weeks."

"I sincerely hope not. I think I should regret my trip to England all my life if this kind of knowledge were to come to me, and I grew to believe in it."

"Upon my soul," exclaimed Frederick, "you talk like a married man, with a family of virtuous daughters. Are you?"

"No," replied Richard, with a smile.

"In love, perhaps! I have heard it attacks some men in the same way you have been speaking. You caught me just now with a syllogism. Answer me. In love?"

Richard Barton parried skillfully. "A delicate question. Confess yourself, first."

"My dear fellow," said the young exquisite of twenty-eight, "I commenced to love so long ago that I cannot remember the date. I have been in love a thousand times."

"Then if you had married all your loves you would have more wives than Solomon—ought to have had."

"What an awful reflection! And what a collection they would make! Dark and fair, tall and short, thin and otherwise. Even Salt Lake would be too hot for me, with such a mixture."

"For my part," said Richard, reflectively, "I think it a pity men don't marry younger."

"The woman's champion!" cried Frederick, with a loud laugh. "Keep to your programme, and my prophecy will come true to the letter. By Jove! the women will be mad about you—"

especially the single girls. You will be held up as an example for all Good Young Men, with capital letters. Your photograph will be hung in every maid's bedroom; there will be reams of letters written about you. Mothers will take you into their confidence—while you are single. Daughters will dress for you, and smile upon you. How they will adore you! They will vote you a statue; and every single daughter of Eve and every match-making mamma shall throw in their contributions. They will festoon the statue with plaits and chignons, and work, in yellow hair, the device, 'Behold the Maiden's Friend!' All this shall happen to you—while you are single. Long may you live so, and may your shadow never grow less!" Frederick laughed heartily at this description, and said presently, in a more sober tone: "But of course, my virtuous friend, you would not have those men marry who can't afford it."

"Certainly not," said Richard, scarcely knowing whether to feel amused or offended at this kind of badinage.

"Then comes the question," continued Frederick, "the all-momentous question, the question of questions, Who can afford to marry? A wife is an expensive luxury; and we can't go in for expensive luxuries without serious consideration. Then divorce is so dear. If one lived in the United States, where I have read you can get a divorce for a few dollars, the affair would wear a different complexion. But here it is no laughing matter. Besides, my dear fellow, when you marry you must marry a woman, and woman is a deception. She is made up to please the eye; she is all paint and powder, and stuffing; she is like the cheap cotton prints which are warranted to wash—at the very first trial, all the color comes out of them."

Richard Barton had now almost made up his mind as to his new friend's opinion, supposing his words to be a faithful reflex of them. He contented himself, however, by saying:

"You surprise me."

"Fact, upon my word," said Frederick Chappell, who, it may be stated, was thoroughly in earnest, "every word of it. You will soon find it out for yourself. A modern woman has another peculiarity. She is like a puzzle—can be taken to pieces, and put together again."

"Well," said Richard, "some day I hope to meet with a"—

"Paragon?" questioned Frederick, interrupting him.

"With a woman," replied Richard, in an earnest tone, "who will not need to be warranted to wash, and who cannot be taken to pieces, and put together again."

"What all of us hope for, my dear fellow, and none of us get. With money, of course?"

"Not with money of course, although I should not object to it."

"Well," said Frederick, who, having aired his views upon woman, now gave her the benefit of a finishing touch, "when I marry I must marry money. It would be too infernally inconvenient to marry a poor woman."

"And love, virtue, goodness?"

"Can all be bought with money, my dear fellow?"

"Then the want of money must indeed be an inconvenience," said Richard Barton, somewhat sternly. "But there is something worse than that."

"Can't imagine it. What is it?"

"Want of heart."

CHAPTER VII.

A BATTLE OF WORDS.

THE turn which the conversation between the two young men had taken did not promise well for future friendship. As in chemistry there are bodies which fly violently from each other when attempts are made to bring them together, so among men there are natures which it is impossible to bring into unison. Even when, notwithstanding that their inclinations urge them to regard each other with aversion, they strive, for one reason or other, to overcome their antipathy, the attempt is invariably a failure. No

power can make their opposing natures harmonize. The mere presence of one grates upon the other, and it might almost be said that, with their eyes closed, they could detect the baleful influence. It is often a singular feature in this instinctive repulsion, that the parties know no ill of each other. As in the present instance. Here were two men of equal fortune, presumably of equal standing in society, who but a quarter of an hour since were absolute strangers to each other's existence; and although they met on friendly grounds, with no known motive for anything but friendliness, and with every outward circumstance favorable for the cementing of cordial relations, they were, within those few minutes, very nearly on the brink of a quarrel.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to be precise. If they had a quarrel, Richard Barton would have been the open aggressor. He was the more impulsive and hot-blooded of the two—the more sincere and out-spoken, the more inexperienced. Frederick Chappell was too well versed in the usages of polite society to commit a breach of good manners when his passions were not strongly excited; and as, in consequence of a decided laxity in his moral nature, he was not so quick as Richard Barton to take offense in such a manner as this, his cue for aversion was somewhat uncertain.

The situation may be thus briefly described. Richard Barton, hurt and indignant at the flippancy and apparent heartlessness of his companion, was yet very angry with himself for showing temper; and being in a new world, of whose social laws he considered himself ignorant, was not sure that he himself was not in the wrong. Then, his innate love and sense of justice whispered to him that he was ungenerous and uncharitable. This over-nice sense of the moral affections is a great torment to a man. It is like wearing a porcupine's skin, with the points turned inward. A kind of accusing conscience is forever on the alert to prick the soul with doubts and to make every nerve quiver. Frederick Chappell was not thus afflicted. Over the velvet skin of his moral affections all questions of morality and its opposite glided smoothly, no notch being in the way to discompose him. He was, if any thing, amused at Richard Barton's "innocence," as he would have termed it, and was but slightly ruffled by either his companion's tone or words. He had decidedly the best of the situation.

The danger was averted by a timely diversion. A visitor was announced in the person of Mr. Armstrong.

"The very man I was speaking of," said Frederick Chappell to Richard Barton. "Mr. Armstrong, the American. I can introduce you here; you will like him."

Mr. Armstrong entered; a tall, spare man, with clear, sharp-cut features, slightly furrowed by thought, blue eyes, large, shapely hands, and with no hair on his face. I mention his hands, because they were eloquently expressive, and were in some sense an index to his character. Every thing about him was indicative of power and self-possession.

"Mr. Chappell not in?" he asked, as he entered, looking around for the banker.

"No," replied Frederick; "I am left in possession."

Mr. Armstrong nodded carelessly, and his eyes rested upon Richard Barton, who was regarding him with some curiosity.

"I regard this meeting as a very interesting one," said Frederick, in his drawling manner. "Here we are, representatives of three great constituencies, accidentally brought together, all speaking the same language, and having at least something in common. I represent England, which I place first, as the most important constituency of the three."

"England has cause to be proud of its representative," observed Mr. Armstrong, caustically.

"I ought to have warned you," said Frederick, addressing himself to Richard, "that Mr. Armstrong is a wit, and is privileged to say smart things. Next to England, I place Ameri-

ca, represented by Armstrong; you stand for Australia."

"And I venture to state," said Mr. Armstrong, "that the representative of England is the only one of the three who would need prompting on the score of good manners."

Frederick Chappell laughed good-humoredly, and took the hint.

"Mr. Richard Barton, Mr. Armstrong."

"We really have something in common," said Mr. Armstrong, shaking hands cordially with Richard—the young fellow's bright face had an attraction for him—"as we hail from new worlds. Have you been long in London?"

"Only a few days."

"You two will suit each other capitally," said Frederick, in a bantering tone. "I have already discovered that young Australia will believe anything."

Richard gently corrected him; he had almost got over his sore feeling. "No, no; not anything."

"I like a man who believes," said Mr. Armstrong. "I would send all skeptics and sneerers to a land of their own, where they could snarl each other to death."

Frederick held up his hand, as though to protect himself from the words. His manner throughout the conversation was the manner of a man who was indolently conscious of his own superiority.

"Don't be vindictive," he said. "Before you came in, I was sounding your praises. Tell us some news."

"I went to the Cut-and-Come-Again last night. I didn't see you there."

"The Cut-and-Come-Again," said Frederick, in explanation, "is one of our high-class theaters; Mr. Armstrong is an enthusiast on the subject of the drama. What did you see?"

"It was the first night of an original drama written by Mr. Clip."

Frederick again played the part of Chorus. "Clip is one of our best authors. An original drama! That is news indeed. Really original?"

"Without a shadow of doubt. Clip took it from the French, who took it from the Spanish. The French had no right to it, so Clip attached it. It is Clip's clearly. Clever fellow, Clip—a genius. He has produced one hundred and ninety original plays. Long live paste and scissors!"

"We were speaking of the theaters," said Richard. "Mr. Chappell has promised to take me behind the scenes to-night."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong, with a keen look at Frederick, who, in this instance at least, did not seem quite at his ease; "what theater?"

"I don't know," replied Richard; "where a new burlesque is being played, and where he promises to show me a very pretty congregation of sinners."

"By which he means female sinners. Mr. Chappell, I believe, has peculiar views with respect to actresses. Yet why should I say peculiar? He holds them in common with many other young gentlemen."

"Spare me! spare me!" cried Frederick, in a tone of mock appeal.

Mr. Armstrong paid no attention to the sarcasm. "I never neglect an opportunity to speak in defense of the maligned. As Mr. Chappell says, I take great interest in the drama. I love theaters, and am acquainted with a number of good women on the stage. I know more than one who, in the illness or incapacity of their husbands, work hard and cheerfully for food for their children, for the warm clothing which protects them from the cold, for the little boots which cover their tender feet. Shall I be silent, then, when I hear them spoken of in a body as a pretty congregation of sinners? The words themselves convey a reproach which would not be lessened by the tone in which Mr. Chappell is capable of uttering them."

Frederick laughed; nothing that Mr. Armstrong could say seemed to discompose him. Mr. Armstrong continued, and now addressed himself specially to Richard Barton:

"I am an older man than you by many years, and, I doubt not, older in experience by a life-time, and something in your face emboldens me to take a liberty with you. In the world you are about to enter you will soon learn, if you have not learned it already, how common it is to value women only for those qualities which are least creditable to them; you will soon learn how common it is to hold up their small follies and magnify them into great vices, and utterly ignore their sweet and noble virtues. Do not fall into the fashion. Pay no heed to the utterances of our cynics and shallow-pated butterflies, for the world is full of good women."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frederick. "It's enough to take one's breath away. What a capital moral exordium! Mr. Barton, beware of the example of the Bad Boy of this little comedy, if you wish to make a friend of Mr. Armstrong. Be virtuous, my son, and you will be happy. And now, if your schoolmaster has finished his sermon, perhaps he will tell us some more news. You will never find our schoolmaster at a loss, Mr. Barton; he has always something ready. I shall begin soon to think that he is ubiquitous, for he is everywhere and sees everything. A month ago I had occasion to visit Bow Street police court, as a witness in an assault case—deuced hard lines it was, for I was not mixed up with it in any way—and there was our schoolmaster sitting on a bench, watching the poor wretches who were before the magistrate for being drunk and disorderly with as much interest as he would watch the performance of the last opera bouffe."

"I went into a police court last week." "There, Mr. Barton! did I not tell you? Now listen to his experiences."

"It was in the country, and one of your beautiful administrators of justice, in the shape of a justice of the peace, who knows as much of law as my little finger, was on the bench."

"Understand," interposed Frederick, "that, as an American, Mr. Armstrong has a profound contempt for our English institutions, and indeed for all institutions that are not American."

"Understand," rejoined Mr. Armstrong, with a slight frown, "that I have a profound contempt for injustice, wherever it be practised. Country makes no difference to me; I judge by men and manners. Some of your justices of the peace would be a disgrace to any civilized country."

"You have not been to America, Mr. Barton?" asked Frederick.

"No," replied Richard, who followed with interest this battle of words between his new acquaintances. "I hope to go one day."

"There," said Frederick, ironically, "you will find justice administered by immaculate men—men above reproach, beyond corruption. Unhappy me! Why was I born an Englishman?"

"We have deep blots upon our systems," said Mr. Armstrong, "but we have the excuse, at all events, that we are comparatively a new country; and you must bear in mind that we have an enormous number of men of mixed nationalities, and an enormous territory to govern. Why, sir, we could play dice with three Great Britains in a corner of America, and never miss the space!"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Frederick.

"You have no such excuse for misgovernment in this country," continued Mr. Armstrong, "as those I have adduced. You have had time, ripe experience, great intellects, a settled population, to perfect your institutions, which yet do not compare too favorably with ours. But I must pick up the thread of my story. As I said, I went into a country police court last week, where a justice of the peace was dispensing justice. The first case I heard was that of a gentleman who appeared to answer a charge of assault upon a woman. He denied the charge, and said that the woman accosted him in the street—it seems that there had been a previous acquaintance between them of not the most reputable kind—that he simply pushed her aside, and that she

chose to fall into the road, so that she might bring him, a gentleman, before a magistrate. However, the woman had witnesses, who swore to a different version of the affair, and who said that the man brutally struck her. He was convicted, and sent to prison for a month without the option of a fine. The next case was that of a miserable-looking man in rags, who was charged with stealing a turnip from a field. The man was munching the turnip when the policeman pounced upon him, and he was taken red-handed to the station. In his defense the man pleaded that he was starving, and from his appearance this was probably true. To my mind his statement carried conviction with it. He pleaded, moreover, that the turnip was not in the field, that it had tilted over—as naughty turnips sometimes will do—into the common road, and that it was damaged. Anyway, he was starving, and the temptation was not to be resisted. The stomach is a stern tyrant. He was convicted and the justice fined him sixpence for the offense."

"Which you paid!" exclaimed Richard, eagerly.

"I did not say so," replied Mr. Armstrong, gravely.

"Well," said Richard, "these examples do not prove that this justice of the peace was unworthy of his position. The sentences were just ones."

"You believe that I have spoken the truth?"

"Certainly."

"Then you will believe anything. You are a living miracle. I made a slight mistake, and transposed the sentences. The gentleman was fined five shillings for the brutal assault on the woman, and he paid the money with a smile, and walked out of the court with his friends. And the starving man was sent to prison for three months for the brutal assault on the turnip. Long live that justice of the peace, and long may he reign! And now I should like to ask what subject you young gentlemen were discussing when I entered. You appeared to me to have arrived at an awkward phase of it."

Richard Barton turned red at the remembrance of his irritability.

"A great subject, a wonderful subject," replied Frederick; "two, indeed—money and woman."

"You place them in the order of merit?" observed Mr. Armstrong.

"Undoubtedly. The first is the most stupendous theme that I am acquainted with."

"I am greatly disposed to agree with you. The theme is stupendous. Honesty, virtue, charity, and all the virtues that lie beneath it. Truly, such an argument is illimitable. If you commenced it on a day that would last for five thousand years, and talked till the sun was wrinkled and the moon came out on crutches, you could not do it justice."

Frederick Chappell yawned lazily, and said:

"It is a good job for some of us, that we don't live in the times when the devil used to tempt men with money-bags."

"You would have made a bargain with him."

"No doubt of it," said Frederick, very readily. "For twenty thousand a year, and twenty thousand to bolster it up, I would sacrifice much."

"Principles, even?"

"Yes; and every other virtue I may happen to possess."

"Strange," said Mr. Armstrong, who for a reason of his own took Frederick at his word, and appeared to be not disinclined to wrangle with him—"strange that men live who are not subscribers to your faith! Here is a case within my own experience. A firm (say in India), established for half a century—honored, respected, reputed to be wealthy—suddenly stops payment. Johnson, head of the firm, has grown old in honorable commerce. His partner, who has the direction of affairs, has for years been playing Old Harry with them to support his extravagance. Crisis comes; the defaulter flies, and is not heard of again. Johnson, the white-headed, sells every bit of property he possesses, and, with his

wife's consent, gives up a handsome settlement which the law could not have touched, pays every liability of the firm, and is left, at seventy years of age, a beggar, without a shilling, but not dishonored. What is your opinion of him?"

Frederick (shrugging his shoulders): "He is a stupid old sap. He might have stuck to his wife's settlement. No one would have thought the worse of him."

Richard (enthusiastically): "He is a noble fellow. I should like to know him."

Mr. Armstrong turned his back upon Frederick, and held out his hand to Richard, saying:

"Your verdict's a good one, sir, and I like you for it."

Frederick glanced at the clock, and wished that his visitors would go. Mr. Armstrong, however, showed no disposition to leave.

"You two fellows," said Frederick, "owe me eternal gratitude for making you known to each other. You run capitally together. But it's rather good, Mr. Armstrong, to hear you speak in that way of money—you who have the advantage over us poor Englishmen. You Americans are the smartest men in the world for making money."

"I understand you. It is the fashion to say of my countrymen that they are smart—that is, that they will do any mean thing to make money, but do it in such a way that the law can't get hold of them. That is your interpretation of the word 'smart,' as it is applied to us. It is the fashion to say of Americans, 'They're cute, they are!' 'They're smart men, they are!' 'They know how many beans make five, they do!' And we all know what sort of praise that is—such as might make a man feel as mean as a peacock in a thunder-shower."

"Or a donkey sitting on a rainbow," added Frederick, who, in his calm imperturbability, proved himself very nearly a match for Mr. Armstrong. "But you don't mean to say that you are not fond of money?"

"No, sir, I don't mean to say that. I am so fond of money that I believe the sun, moon, and stars are all cut of the wrong pattern."

"Why, what pattern would you have them?" asked Richard.

"The pattern in which it was originally intended they should be shaped—that of the almighty dollar."

"That would do for the States," said Frederick. "What would you do for England?"

"I would have the sun and the moon each fashioned to the shape of a fat pound £, and all the stars should be cut into little s's and d's to represent the shillings and the pence."

Both the young men laughed at the extravagant absurdity of the notion, and Frederick said that, as the Americans were strong on patents, Mr. Armstrong ought to take out a patent for his new scheme of the planets and constellations. In the midst of their laughter, Trail appeared at the door and announced a new visitor.

"Mr. Fangle, sir."

Mr. Fangle, upon entering, looked fussily around. He was a short, spare man, not too well dressed, whose joints seemed to be set upon wires.

"Ah, Fangle," said Frederick, "we were just advising Mr. Armstrong to take out a patent." And then the young gentleman glanced again at the clock and rose nervously. His great anxiety now was to get rid of his visitors.

"Patent!" cried Mr. Fangle, who was a humble hanger-on to the skirts of the rich, into whose society he had by some means wormed himself. "Patent for what?"

Mr. Armstrong answered him. "For always coming in at the nick of time—for causing the fruits to grow in the jam-pots ready for the market—for drawing people together at the exact moment they want to see one another—for bringing future generations into the world upon a new principle—"

"Goodness gracious!" cried Mr. Fangle, beating his hands together.

"—And for refining everything and every-

body to such a state of perfection, that the only trouble in life a person will have in the world is the trouble of being born."

"Bless my soul! you are joking, surely! Why, that beats my invention. I have it in my pocket—No, no; what did I say?" And Mr. Fangle looked rather wildly around and clapped his hand to his waistcoat.

"In your pocket!" they all exclaimed. "Show it, show it!"

"I daren't, I daren't; I'm under a bond. Besides, it isn't quite complete yet—wants one little screw."

"A screw loose, eh?" said Frederick, with a sneer.

"I—I shall astonish the world, gentlemen," proceeded Mr. Fangle, flushed and flurried. "And you will all be here to see it, I hope. Then—then I can show my friends that I know how to appreciate past kindnesses. Fangle has a heart. Steam is nothing to it."

"To your heart?" inquired Mr. Armstrong of the little man, in a kinder tone than Frederick had used.

"No, Mr. Armstrong, no—to my invention. Steam is nothing to it; electricity is nothing to it. When it is completed I shall be a millionaire, gentlemen—a millionaire! Mr. Armstrong," he whispered, "will you give me half a minute of your time? Our friends will excuse us: a matter of importance—of confidence."

"Oh, certainly," said Frederick Chappell; and he and Richard turned aside.

Then, with a look of deep anxiety, Mr. Fangle said to Mr. Armstrong:

"I went to your office, and I heard you were here. I took the liberty of following you. You will pardon me." Mr. Armstrong's hand stole into his pocket, and Mr. Fangle observed the action with a sigh of satisfaction. "May I trespass once more upon your kindness? I am in great distress—will you lend me half a sovereign?"

A slight smile played about Mr. Armstrong's lips as he said:

"Half a sovereign! And you a millionaire!"

"Some day, some day, perhaps—but till then—misfortunes of struggling genius!"

"Say no more, Mr. Fangle. Here is a sovereign. Owe me the change."

As Mr. Fangle received the money, upon which his fingers closed greedily, Trail once more made his appearance at the door. Frederick Chappell went hastily to his side.

"The young lady, sir," said Trail—"Miss Laura."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWARRANTABLE DIGRESSION AND A WARRANTABLE EXPLANATION.

THE persons who play their parts in this story are but little, if at all, removed from the common run of men and women. Of wonderful characters the world has but few; you can count them upon your fingers, and the chances are that, if you met one of these rare birds in society, and conversed with him, you would be wofully disappointed. Very seldom is it that pearls are distilled from the tongue—such pearls, at least, as you would be on the lookout for from the tongue of such a man. That man is happy indeed who lives through his life without having his ideals shattered; and be assured, if that man breathes, he lives not in a crowded city.

The passions and emotions which animate the characters in this story, and direct their words and actions, are also of the common order, therefore it is unlikely that you will have the pleasure of reading in these pages any records of amazing adventures or hair-breadth escapes. Here and there a surprise may occur or an unexpected turn may be given to the incidents, but of these the author can not claim to be the inventor; they are but the natural outcome of the ordinary passions and emotions referred to, which in their workings are surely sufficient for any literary craftsman. There is

no need even in a story of city life, such as this is, to encroach upon the land of romance. The chess-board of the commonest lives presents strange and startling variations, and the old stories are being played over and over again, every day in the year—with constantly new effect, because the actors in them are new. Romance glows in courts and narrow streets, and those who gaze from a superior standpoint upon the common scenes from which they are removed, see not the mediate lights and shades which make up the sum of the lives of the dwellers therein. A strong light and a deep shadow they have the power to discern, and these, presented in an airy, attractive fashion, are alluring to a mass of readers who do not desire their authors to be too much in earnest. To them, earnestness, apart from the serious occupation of life—to wit, the making of money—is a bugbear; and business men out of business hours avoid it as, if they had the power, they would avoid a nightmare. We require our dramatists and writers of fiction to amuse us, they say; we do not wish to be bored with an overabundance of earnestness. They may be simple, if they please; they may tickle us with a mystery; but they must not make our heads ache with their earnestness. We have enough of that in our offices; we want sedatives in our leisure.

Notwithstanding which remonstrance, they are sometimes deluded into swallowing sugar-coated pills.

And it is to be noted that many stories, simple in their construction, are found to contain tragic elements. Simplicity, I know, is out of vogue, and yet how often do we, who, for the most part, live artificial lives, and poison life's best and brightest leaves with fashion's follies—how often do we tired-out men and women sigh for that simplicity which we turn so religiously from our doors! There, we say when we are wearied with tasteless hours, there is true happiness unalloyed. With few wants and fewer cares, that one from the country, with the roses in her cheeks, with sunlight dancing in her eyes, tastes the sweetest sweets of life, and enjoys them. They fall not on her tongue; daisies and sweet-smelling flowers are strewn among her days, and she gathers joy and gladness from them.

For it is always in the country, and from the country, that simplicity is said to live and spring. I myself have grown to believe that in crowded cities, where we knock each other down as we hurry along, where we push and squeeze with merciless disregard of our neighbor's ribs, there is no room for simplicity, and that only in the country does it find a dwelling-place.

How often have we heard that God made the country, and man made the town! In plays the country maiden is brought to the fevered city, and the sweet, modest primrose is invariably transformed into the gaudy, flaunting sunflower. Before you were thought of, this view of simplicity was preached and believed in. Being in a variable mood, I should begin to waver in my belief if I were to ask myself if this view is true; for the subject is many-sided, and presents different aspects from different points of view. In this age of selfishly influenced action, the mental faculty is put to base uses, prostrated, degraded, as it were. I belong to such and such an order, therefore I believe that a certain thing is true; you belong to such and such an order, therefore you believe that this same thing is false. I am working for such and such an end, therefore I see clearly that this is white; you are working for such and such an end, therefore you see clearly that it is black. This man is high-minded, noble, virtuous, I say; he is mean-souled, base, vicious, you say. What you hold to be sacred, I despise; what I admire, you condemn. And in the main our judgments are influenced, not by calm consideration, but by the circumstances which surround our selfish aims, and the positions in which we are placed.

Which induces me to remark that, although

this is a pure digression from the story, it yet can be made to apply; for numbers of persons would hold Frederick Chappell in high regard and esteem for the very qualities which render him objectionable to Mr. Armstrong and Richard Barton.

Life is so full of astonishing contrasts—wedded in many instances—that you can evolve from it nothing more startling than the wildest imagination can invent.

And it is suggested to me that in a certain newspaper of yesterday's date, I read of a deed perpetrated in a quiet, happy-looking, little village which turned my blood cold. This modest little village, imbosomed in green hills, far away from the hot breath of cities, is just the place where, according to popular belief, simplicity should have its home; yet the worst passions have found their worst development there, and the place is poisoned by more than one foul deed.

Again: it was but the other night that I was walking home after a happy interview. It was a cold night, and the snow was falling, but my blood was in a glow. I had occasion to pass a quaint old church, standing by an ancient cemetery—strangely out of place in the locality in which it was situated—and attracted by its beauty and peacefulness, which seemed to be in harmony with my condition, I lingered there, and walked around it twice or thrice, indulging in happy thought. The next day I heard that a poor outcast woman had been found in this churchyard, lying dead in the snow, and that she must have died within a few minutes of the time I had lingered there so happily.

One thought suggests another, and, like dogs in the leash, they are comrades following the same trail. I remember meeting one whom I knew and liked with a fair liking. An old man was he, with ruddy face, merry tongue, always blithe and joyous, with a cheery laugh and a strong and sympathizing friendship in his horny fingers. For years I knew him, and went regularly into the country, where he had lived since his boyhood, to see him and those he had gathered about him. "Dear, simple, old man!" I thought, as I gazed upon his white hair, and venerable, honest face; "You at least have had the talisman with you all your days; you at least have enjoyed through all your seasons the happiness which comes from simplicity of habits and character."

He died when he was seventy-eight years of age, and among his papers I, who was privileged to search, found letters with which this man's life was enwoven, so terrible in their revelations, so overwhelmingly shocking, that all my admiration was turned to horror. If the seal of secrecy were not upon my tongue, I could a tale unfold respecting this simple, honest, ever-blithe and cheery old man, in the light of which the most startling and unreal I have ever read would pale to insignificance.

Nothing so tragic will be found in this story, although it will comprise something unusual in this prosy world, in the shape of an act of heroism—I think I may call it so—the natural evolution of a splendid self-sacrifice. And now, my digression being at an end, I can proceed to a pertinent explanation of the state of affairs at this juncture.

As a man of fashion, and one possessed of means and a good standing in society, Frederick Chappell was everywhere welcomed. Being a young gentleman of liberal ideas, he was not very particular as to the society in which he mixed; and one hour he would shake hands with a lord, and the next be hail-fellow-well-met to persons of very doubtful reputation. He was known on every race-course of England, and all the bookmakers were ready and eager to lay him the odds. Among his acquaintances he numbered two or three theatrical managers and lessees, and he gained admission to certain green-rooms, and behind the scenes of certain theaters, where, as he spent his money freely, he was a favorite. Here he picked up an author or two, whose vanity he tickled by obtaining cards for them

on rare occasions to his ambitious mother's assemblies, who, as has been stated, was fond patronizing celebrities.

It is probable, also, that in these places he added to his stock of wild oats, in the accumulation of which he was so zealous an adept. He made jokes with the men, and indulged in conversation of a kind very common nowadays—as I suppose it was in days gone by when wits and bloods assembled—but which is scarcely fit to put on paper; he flattered the actresses and paid court to them; even, in his impartiality, to the lesser stars, who were delighted by his attentions; and for these and other reasons he was regarded as a welcome visitor, and was never denied admittance by the janitors who sit in those queer little boxes by the stage-doors. Being in his way something of a hero, and accustomed to triumphs, he was nettled and worked into a state of interesting despair by a series of rebuffs which he received from a very neophyte in the histrionic art.

With a liking for new faces, he was attracted one night, as he lounged in the stalls of his favorite theater, by a pretty girl who played a small part with grace and effect. Going behind the scenes, he learned that she was new to the stage, and had only played for a few nights. The stage manager said he thought she would develop into a good actress. It was sufficient for Frederick Chappell that she was young and pretty, and he paid court to her. His attentions were at first received with politeness, and even with gratitude, as it seemed to him, but when he became bolder in his words, he met with a check which hurt his pride. As is the way of men under such circumstances, her indifference warmed his passion, and he became more ardent toward her. But he never advanced a step in her affections. He offered her presents; she refused them. He threw flowers to her upon the stage, and she allowed them to lie at her feet. When they were brought to her to the side-scenes, she received them with coldness, and invariably left them in the theater. He made various attempts to discover where she lived, and every attempt was repulsed. He thought of her more than he would have cared to own, for nothing but mortification had resulted from his pursuit of her.

There was no doubt that he was wildly enamored of her; he committed many extravagances in his mad infatuation, and without any idea that he was disgracing his manhood by so doing (so lax were his morals), he wrote her a letter which made her tremble with shame. It was returned to him torn to pieces, and without a word in reply.

For most men these continued defeats would have been sufficient, and they might have been sufficient for Frederick Chappell but for one singular feature. In the midst of all her abhorrence of him, she yet forced herself to be civil to him, and evinced a distinct desire not to anger him too deeply. She appeared, indeed, to be in some way afraid of him, and never betrayed her feelings toward him to any of her professional acquaintances. He took pains to make himself acquainted with this strange feature in their intercourse, and as the cogitations of such like young gentlemen are invariably flattering to themselves, he construed her behavior in a way which would have dismayed her had she suspected it. During all this time she was rising steadily in her profession, and really bade fair to make her mark. The construction he placed upon her conduct was this: "She is playing with me; she has no real dislike for me, or she would show it to others; whereas she carefully avoids saying an ill word of me lest it should come to my ears, and cause me to cease my attentions. Artful young creature!" He did not credit her with any true womanly feeling of modesty and virtue.

Perhaps, however, it will be more correct to say that he never gave this phase of the matter a thought. She was an actress; that was enough for him, and he arrived at his own conclusions from that simple circumstance. "I will repay her in her own coin," he thought;

and he did not speak to her for a week. This appeared to cause her infinite content, and although during this week he went nearly every night behind the scenes, and flirted with others to arouse her jealousy, she never once spoke to him, never once looked toward him. She could not more effectually have fed his passion. Every comparison he made between her and other young ladies of his acquaintance was in her favor; she was well educated, and a lady in her manners, although it was no secret that she had adopted the stage purely for the sake of money. He resumed his old tactics, and was received with even greater coldness. "I do not bid high enough," he thought; and in the ardor of his pursuit, he bought her a very costly present—nothing less than a brooch and ear-rings of diamonds.

In this offering on the altar of his passion he sacrificed a hundred guineas. He wrote a sentimental letter, and left that and the case containing the jewels with the door-keeper, who was in his pay, with instructions that they should be given to the young lady when she was alone. He argued that, if only from womanly curiosity, she would be certain to open the case; and he felt assured that she would be won by the magnificence of the offering. The door-keeper was faithful to the instructions given him, and when Frederick in the course of the night strolled into the theater with an expression of calm satisfaction on his face—as of one who came to receive homage and looks, and perhaps words, of regard which had hitherto been held from him—the jewel-case and the letter were returned to him. The letter had not been opened, nor the dainty case taken out of its covering. With a feeling of mortification which it was impossible for him to conceal, he asked for an explanation and received it. When the young lady was passing to her dressing-room the door-keeper had offered her the tokens; she asked who had left them, and refused to touch them until she learned; and, when she heard the name of Frederick Chappell, she simply desired that they should be returned to him. Within a few days of this rejection he heard that she was about to leave the theater.

According to the way in which he argued out the matter with himself, it became almost a point of honor with him not to relinquish his pursuit of the girl who had so infatuated him; his passion was now stronger than ever; she grew daily more beautiful and more graceful in his eyes, and he was ready to commit any extravagance for her. He was certain, if he could obtain an interview with her, that she would at least listen to him; and he trusted to his good looks, his position in society, and his money, to do the rest. Excited into this belief, he committed the indiscretion of sending her a note by Trail, in handwriting slightly disguised, asking her to call at the bank, on a matter of importance, at a time when he was aware that his father would be absent. He had scarcely an idea as to what he should say to her; he acted on the impulse of passion, without looking to the end; he wished to see her, and speak with her privately—that was all.

This was precisely the position of affairs when Trail opened the door, and whispered to Frederick Chappell:

"The young lady, sir—Miss Laura."

CHAPTER IX.

FREDERICK CHAPPELL'S LOVE-MAKING.

FREDERICK CHAPPELL received Trail's announcement with a feeling of bitter exasperation toward his companions. It was a most unfortunate moment for him, and he was mad with himself for not having got rid of his friends before the arrival of the young lady. He had tried in a dozen different ways—by yawning, by pretending to be busy with the papers on his father's desk, by rising now and then and looking toward the door, as though in expectation of an important visitor, even by an occasional insolence of tone—to induce them to leave, but, as has been seen, without

success. All of these hints had been flung at Mr. Armstrong, but the American gentleman, whom Frederick in his heart most cordially disliked, declined to accept them. The relations that existed between these two men were of a somewhat singular nature; from the first day of their acquaintanceship there had been no friendship between them, and each was aware of the other's feelings. Had it not been for Mr. Chappell's strict injunctions to his son not to quarrel with Mr. Armstrong, Frederick's sentiments would have been openly expressed; but Mr. Chappell's directions on this point were stern and very distinct, and he even insisted upon his son paying marked attention to Mr. Armstrong. It is probable that Mr. Armstrong had his own special reasons for adhering to this silent compact of simulated friendliness; otherwise it is scarcely likely that so outspoken a man, and one who was Frederick's senior by ten or twelve years, would have been a consenting party to it.

The young lady was at the door, and Frederick had no time for hesitation. She must be admitted at once, or told that Mr. Chappell was engaged. For one moment Frederick thought of adopting the latter course; the next, it was rejected. He might not have another opportunity of seeing her privately—indeed, this was the first that had offered itself in the whole term of their acquaintanceship, and such a passion as his was not amenable to reason. But how to dispose of his friends? Under no circumstances must Mr. Armstrong be allowed to discover who his visitor was. On more than one occasion Frederick had seen the American behind the scenes of the theater in which the young actress was playing, and she must be kept now from his prying eyes. The young gentleman was neither too nice nor too modest to be ashamed of an adventure of this description, but he had a sensible objection against putting a weapon into Mr. Armstrong's hands, which from previous experience he knew would be mercilessly used. So, with a not ill-assumed air of careless ease, he turned to his companions, and said, blandly:

"Gentlemen, I throw myself upon your consideration. I have a visitor."

"And we are in the way," said Mr. Armstrong. "Come along, Mr. Barton. If you have nothing better in view, I propose to bore you with my company for an hour."

Richard Barton, having nothing better in view, expressed his pleasure at the proposition, and the gentlemen were about to depart by the door by which they entered, and by which Trail was standing, when Frederick, who knew that in that case they could not miss seeing the young lady, said hurriedly:

"No, no; not that way. It is a matter of delicacy—of private importance—and the gentleman does not wish to be seen. If you would not mind amusing yourselves in this room"—(throwing open the door of one of the inner rooms)—"for a quarter of an hour, you would be rendering me—and my father—a great service. Really, I am very sorry."

"Well," said Mr. Armstrong, "we have only ourselves to blame for being made prisoners. Don't keep us long."

"Not a moment more than is necessary. You will find books and papers, and by a little persuasion you may induce Mr. Fangle to explain the nature of his invention to you."

"A capital idea. Come along, Mr. Fangle."

"Not for worlds!" cried Mr. Fangle; "not for worlds! Wouldn't drop a hint of it for untold gold, until that little screw is right."

"We will amuse ourselves somehow," said Mr. Armstrong. "If we grow dull or quarrelsome, we will knock for you to release us. Does the gentleman wear a veil, Mr. Chappell?"

Frederick Chappell turned scarlet at this perfectly random shot, and Mr. Armstrong looked at him keenly, and shrugged his shoulders. In the midst of Frederick's confused reply the three gentlemen retired to the inner room. Then Frederick, making sure that the door was closed, said, with a sigh of relief:

"You can show the lady in, Trail."

"Yes, sir,"

In another moment his visitor entered. In that brief interval Frederick had contrived to place himself in such a position that his face could not be seen by her.

Being the heroine of this story, she is, by legitimate usage, entitled to a detailed description; but in pursuance of a certain rule which I have set down for myself in these pages, I shall break through established custom, and shall content myself by saying that she was pretty, graceful, and lady-like, and scarcely twenty years of age. As handsome is as handsome does, it will be hereafter seen whether she is worthy of the position I have assigned to her.

She approached Frederick with timid steps, and said, in a low, anxious tone:

"I received your note, sir, and I hastened here at the earliest opportunity."

A movement on the part of Frederick brought his face to her view, and at the sight of it she recoiled in confusion. There was nothing in his manner to alarm her; it was eminently pleasant and graceful. He held out his hand to her, but in her agitation she did not notice the action.

"I—I beg your pardon. I came to see your father."

"He is not in, Laura," said Frederick; "will I not do as well?"

There was more decision, but still some anxiety in her manner, as she answered:

"No, sir, I think not, unless you can explain why I was sent for. I received a note from your father, saying that he wished to speak to me on a matter of importance."

Now Frederick had for some time forgotten that the note he had sent to her was written in a disguised hand, and he had placed a construction favorable to himself on her ready acceptance of the invitation. "She cannot for a moment suppose," he thought, "that my father can have any business with her. She is playing with me still, the little witch." He was armed for this interview, his weapons being the diamond brooch and ear-rings, which in their velvet case now lay upon the desk by his side. He had a steady reliance on their efficacy. "She has only to see them," he thought. Laura, standing modestly before him, gazed at him with visible agitation, and did not in the least suspect the nature of his thoughts. With a look of passionate admiration, he said:

"Can you not guess, Laura, why you were sent for?"

The tenderness of his tone was lost upon her; the question, indeed, seemed to bring terror and distress to her, and she answered, humbly and imploringly:

"I scarcely dare to think what matter of importance your father can have to communicate to me; but he said so much in his note."

"The cunning little actress!" he thought. "She pretends not to know that I should be here to receive her; but she can't deceive me."

"Take a seat, Laura," he said, pleasantly, "and rest for a few minutes."

"I cannot stay, sir, if your father is not here." She paused, and then said, with renewed earnestness, "Do you know why he sent for me?"

He answered her question by another: "And you really expected to see him here, Laura?"

"For what other reason have I come, sir? One o'clock was the hour named in his note. It is very strange! The attendant gave me to understand that he was in."

"You asked for Mr. Chappell, I presume, Laura, and as I am my father's son, we bear the same name. If there is any mistake it is a very natural one; but there is no mistake, Laura. I will be frank with you. It was I who wrote the note."

"You?" She took the note from her pocket and glanced at it. "This, sir, is not your writing."

"All is fair in love and war," said Frederick, with gay familiarity. "I really wrote the note, and disguised my hand. I was afraid you might not come if you recognized my writing." (These last words were prompted by the thought that it would be wise to flatter

her by a seeming belief in her assumed ignorance.)

"You thought I would not come!" she exclaimed scornfully. "You knew I would not come."

His confident air did not desert him; he was satisfied that she was acting a part, and the circumstance of her not having shown, up to this point of the interview, any desire to leave the room, confirmed him in his belief. With his hand on the jewel-case, he felt that the victory was certain.

"One word, sir," she said. "Can I believe you? Can I believe that your father does not desire to see me?"

As a man of honor, he placed his hand upon his heart, and bowed. "You can place implicit belief in my statement. I should say that my father would not know you if you stood before him, and, as he is not a play-goer, I doubt if he has ever heard your name."

This assurance appeared to afford her great relief, and the expression of anxiety died out of her face.

"I was told that you are about to leave the theater," he continued, "and I was desirous of hearing from your own lips that it is not true."

"It is true," she replied, with an uneasy glance around.

"Have you another engagement—and at what theater, Laura?"

"I hope not to act again."

"The stage can ill afford to lose one so beautiful and talented. I did not know how soon you might leave, and I was most anxious to speak to you. You are not frightened?"

She gave him a disdainful look. "Oh no am not frightened."

"I knew of no other way of seeing you privately. Your assumed coldness toward me lately when I came to the theater"—

"Assumed, sir!" she exclaimed, with a slight trembling in her voice.

He waived the point, as became a man of gallantry. "—And the number of prying eyes around us made it difficult for me to address you with calmness. When a man's feelings are as deep and sincere as mine are, they are not easy to control; and you must admit that I showed every consideration for you."

"I fail to see, sir," said Laura, proudly, "in what way that consideration has been shown."

"There you are ungrateful, Laura. Did I not respect the quiet intimation of your wish that I should not be too conspicuous in my attentions? It was for this reason, and for this reason only, that sometimes when I was behind the scenes I paid attention to other ladies in the company; but I never wavered in my devotion."

"You were free to do so for me, sir; you cannot be ignorant of my sentiments toward you."

With blind infatuation, he attributed these words to jealousy, and congratulated himself.

"It pained me exceedingly to do so, I assure you. I held off entirely out of consideration for you, and waited for a favorable opportunity to address you."

She turned toward the door, but he placed himself in her way. "Nay," he said, with some show of entreaty, and in his own opinion with a magnanimous exhibition of good nature, "you must not go until you have given me the opportunity of justifying myself." He held the jewel-case in his hand, and glanced at it complacently.

"Why did you return my note to the door-keeper the other night?"

"I had no wish to read it, sir."

"Cruel!" he said, his self-confidence being but slightly disturbed by her persistently cold manner. "And not even to deign to receive the parcel that accompanied it! That was scarcely like you, Laura, for it contained my justification. I know that I have not behaved to you exactly as I ought to have done; but you should not throw a fellow over without giving him a chance of setting himself right. Will you read my note now?"

He held it toward her, retaining the jewel-case.

"No, sir," she replied firmly, but in great secret distress, for the way to the door was still barred by him.

"Still obstinate! But you cannot, in common fairness, refuse to hear me in my own defense. I have already said that I have not behaved exactly right to you—I own it frankly, and I want to give you reparation in deeds, not in words. This is yours; accept it with my love, and make me the happiest of men."

He opened the jewel-case, and offered it to her. He expected looks and words of delight and admiration from her; he received, instead, a look of scorn and words of contempt. The girl, young as she was, was not weak, nor was she afraid of him for her own sake. Still he kept his patience, and laid the case close to her, saying as he did so:

"Perhaps my way of offering it displeases you. Well, accept it in your own way, to show that we are friends, even, if you like—though it grieves me to speak so coldly—as a mark of simple respect."

"What respect can you have for me," she retorted, with flashing eyes, "when you lure me here under a false pretense, knowing that I have no wish to see you? What respect can you have for me when you detain me here against my will?"

Somewhat sullenly he replied, "You might have gone before were you sincere in what you say."

"I could not," she said, with her hand upon her heart, which was beating violently. "I was deceived into the belief that your father wished to speak to me on a matter of importance, and it was for that reason I came."

Then he gave expression to the thought which had dwelt in his mind when Laura first entered the room.

"Come, come, I am a man of the world, and I know some of its ways. You cannot quite deceive me, Laura. And I am not deceived, unless you assure me of something of which I am at present ignorant. Are you personally acquainted with my father?"

"No, sir."

"Has he ever written to you before?"

"No, sir."

"And as I told you, I am positive he has never seen you, and would not know you if you stood before him. Well, then, what possible matter of importance could he have to communicate to you, when you are utter strangers to each other? No, no, Laura, you cannot quite deceive me. There is no reason in the world why we should not be the best of friends. Really, now," he said, looking about him as though appealing to an unseen audience, "I don't think I have behaved so badly after all, and I do think you owe me a debt of gratitude for contriving to see you in this quiet way, so that (if you have any such scruples) you might not be compromised."

"Have you not already sufficiently compromised me?" she asked, indignantly. "Your servant brings me a letter from you making an appointment with me which I accept."

He interrupted her eagerly. "You surely do not think that in writing to you I was actuated by any feelings but those of love and devotion? No, hang it, Laura! Give me credit at least for being a gentleman! My man did not know what was in the letter, and it is the first time he has been employed upon such an errand. You need have no fear of him; he is discretion itself. I have no desire to detain you against your will, but I did hope that you would have had some feeling for one whose heart is entirely yours."

She did not hear his words. Her eyes were fixed upon the windows of the room, which looked out on the street. These windows were fitted with wire-blinds, which enabled those in the room to see the passers-by outside, without giving the persons in the street a corresponding advantage. Frederick Chappell's last words were not well chosen; they sounded artificially, even in his ears, and he moved aside so that

Laura might reach the door without obstruction on his part. When he found that she did not take advantage of this free passage, he was puzzled and flattered, and he resumed his former position. Laura did not observe his movements. Her attention was centered upon the figure of Rigby, the old hall-porter of the bank, which she could clearly see through the wire-blinds. The old man was lingering in the street, as though undecided whether to enter the bank; but although his manner betrayed embarrassment, there was an expression of pride and joy on his face. Frederick also saw the old man, and noticed his manner and expression. "The old reprobate has been drinking," thought Frederick; "I wonder the governor doesn't discharge him. He is a disgrace to the bank." Then struck by Laura's silence, he was surprised to see that she was white and trembling, and that her hand was resting upon a chair for support. He set it all down to acting on her part, and began to think that he was winning the game.

"You are as fickle as" (Cressida, he was about to say, but he reflected that Laura would scarcely consider it a compliment)—"as—a woman," he said; "one moment hot, one moment cold. Come—take my hand, and let us be friends."

For the second time during the interview she refused to take his hand. This girl is difficult to win, he confessed to himself; all the more credit in winning her. He scarcely had a doubt of his success, now that she seemed to be staying in the room of her own free-will, but his voice betrayed some slight irritation when he spoke again.

"Why will you not shake hands? Upon my soul, it is a little too bad! I remember the time when you looked upon me as a friend."

The figure of the old hall-porter was still to be seen through the blind. She turned her back to the window, as though fearful that any one should see her in the room.

"At that time, sir," she said, slowly and distinctly, "I regarded you as a gentleman."

"And now," he asked bitterly.

She did not reply. Her silence mortified him more than her words would have done, but he still managed to speak with a certain ease.

"May I ask in what way I have forfeited your good opinion? I had the pleasure of being introduced to you at the theater, and not even knowing your name—for you yourself told me you played under an assumed name"—

"It was my father's wish."

"I paid you every attention that devotion could prompt. By what unfortunate chance, then, have I forfeited your confidence?"

She glanced at the window. The old hall-porter was gone.

Some spark of remorse entered the young man's breast, and he said, with an earnestness he had not up to this moment felt:

"Can I do nothing to win your esteem?"

"Nothing, sir," she replied, her only anxiety being to escape from the room, now that Rigby was no longer to be seen; "allow me to pass."

But he still stood before her, scarcely knowing that he barred the way. Seeing another door, and thinking it would afford her means of egress, she made a step toward it and turned the handle. It was the door of the room to which Richard Barton, Mr. Fangle, and the American had retired, by Frederick Chappell's wish. As she opened the door, she heard sounds of laughter, and she shrank back, dismayed at this new danger. At the same moment the three gentlemen came out of the inner room, all laughing and talking together.

CHAPTER X.

RIGBY MAKES HIS APPEARANCE AT A CRITICAL MOMENT.

"You have released us too soon," cried Mr. Armstrong, in a merry tone, advancing into the room without observing Laura; "one minute more, and we should have wormed the secret out of Mr. Fangle."

"No, no, really—I protest" expostulated Mr.

Fangle, holding up his hands to ward off Mr. Armstrong's words, as though they were blows. He saw Laura, but, being a discreet man, he took no notice of her. "You must not believe it, Mr. Chappell; you must not believe it."

Frederick Chappell was too agitated to respond to this appeal.

"I submit the case to Mr. Barton," said Mr. Armstrong, still in a laughing mood. "Was not Mr. Fangle on the point of revealing the secret of that little screw when the door was opened?"

Richard Barton's attention was not given to Mr. Armstrong's words. He had caught sight of Laura's white face, and he had eyes for nothing else. The young man was experiencing a keen pang of disappointment. The girl before him was the same he had seen at the theater, and who, he had declared to the elder Mr. Chappell, was, he was certain, as good as she was beautiful. It pained him deeply to see her in the room with Frederick, after having been made acquainted with that gentleman's opinion of actresses. Mr. Armstrong was standing in such a position that Laura was hidden from, but following the direction of Richard's gaze, he turned and saw her.

"My dear Miss Laura!" he cried, in a tone of surprise. And then, for a moment, a shadow rested on his face. But Laura had seized his outstretched hand with a grateful sigh, and the shadow disappeared. He retained her hand, and looked at Frederick, whose manner was not remarkable for self-possession. As if satisfied with what was expressed in the young man's demeanor, Mr. Armstrong glanced at the jewel-case which was lying open on the table. The glittering gems spoke very plainly to the American gentleman; they told a tale that was not strange to him, and the glitter in his eyes outshone the glitter of the diamonds.

"Are those yours?" he asked of Laura, pointing to the jewels.

The girl's lips shaped "No."

Mr. Armstrong smiled contemptuously at Frederick, in silent fury, closed the case with a snap, and pushed it aside. Frederick would have given much for the power of uttering words fitting for the occasion—words which would have placed him in a more advantageous position than that which this sudden discovery had forced upon him; but he was utterly at a loss; his false tongue refused to aid him. He mentally cursed his ill-luck in not allowing Laura to quit the room before Mr. Armstrong appeared. He would not have cared for Barton and Fangle; they did not know Laura, and he could have easily thrown dust into their eyes.

"What brings you here?" asked Mr. Armstrong, drawing Laura aside.

Richard watched the progress of the scene with almost breathless interest.

The young girl made no immediate answer; she had not yet recovered from her agitation.

"Take courage," said Mr. Armstrong, very gently. "What brings you here? This is no place for you."

"I know it," she replied, slowly and timidly, "and I should not have come. But I was led to believe that this gentleman's father wished to see me on important business, and I obeyed the summons."

"Led to believe!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong; "in what way?"

All who were present heard the dialogue, and Frederick, aroused to action, addressed himself to Mr. Armstrong in a tone which was, and was meant to be, offensive.

"Allow me to remind you that this is my room, and that any private matters you may have so talk about had better be discussed elsewhere."

"We will relieve you of our presence presently," said Mr. Armstrong, with quiet contempt.

"I was under the impression that your father's room was used for different purposes than those to which you would devote it. Your father shares my impression, no doubt. In what way, Laura, were you led to believe that this gentleman's father wished to see you?"

"I received a note this morning, and I understood it was from him. You will know why

such a summons would cause me anxiety, and why I obeyed it."

"Yes, I know; show me the note."

She gave him the note, and he read it.

"It is clear, and you could not do otherwise than come. I do not recognize the writing."

"It is mine," said Frederick, boldly.

"Disguised," observed Mr. Armstrong. "A poor plot—but worthy of the inventor. I will keep the note, if you will allow me, Laura."

"I have no use for it. I can go now, can I not? Will you please see me to the street-door?"

"Certainly. But first let me introduce you to a friend of mine, Mr. Richard Barton, who has just arrived from the Antipodes, and brings with him the freshness of a new world. Barton, you will be proud of the introduction when I tell you that I have never known a lady whom I esteem more highly."

Laura gave the American a look of gratitude. His words were well chosen, and comforted her inexpressibly. Richard's face had grown brighter at the explanation of Laura's presence.

"I had the pleasure," said Richard, as he bowed to Laura, "of seeing you last night."

"You were in the theater!" asked Laura.

"Yes," he replied, softly.

Mr. Armstrong had a purpose in introducing Laura and Richard to each other at this apparently inopportune time. He saw that Frederick Chappell could scarcely control his passion, and he wished to avoid an open quarrel. The introduction served to divert Richard's and Laura's attention from the young banker. Mr. Armstrong stepped to Frederick's side, and gazed steadily into his face.

"If you have anything to say," said Mr. Armstrong, "it will be as well to speak low, so that they shall not hear."

"I shall please myself as to that," retorted Frederick, but at the same time pitching his voice in a low key. "By what right do you presume to dictate to me?"

Mr. Armstrong carelessly tapped the pocket in which he had placed Frederick's note, and said, "Keep cool, Mr. Chappell. We have never been friends, but there is no reason, notwithstanding what has occurred, that we should not continue on the terms we have hitherto maintained. We will agree to mutually despise each other in a quiet way." A smile accompanied this proposal.

"I may find another way to make you pay for this."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said Mr. Armstrong, with imperturbable coolness; "in these days it would be considered brutal to administer to you the rough punishment you deserve. You know my opinion of your conduct, but I shall not condescend to quarrel with you. Take my advice; I am an older man than you, with a cooler head. Say as little as possible about this affair. If it come to your father's ears it will cause unpleasant consequences in more ways than one. If it occur to you to make amends by an apology, do so, like a man, and in some part redeem your credit."

But it did not so occur to Frederick Chappell, and after a short pause, Mr. Armstrong continued:

"Understand me clearly. I am desirous that what has taken place in this room shall not be carried to other ears than ours. It is only for the young lady's sake I consent to hush the matter up."

"So that you may play the part of the magnanimous hero in her eyes! There is no fear of my misunderstanding you. I know now the reason why you were so often behind the scenes. I have interfered with your game, have I? But you are a sly worker."

"Place any construction you please upon my conduct," said Mr. Armstrong, with unruffled temper. "My only anxiety at present is that the young lady's name shall not be made the occasion for light talk. There are only we four, and I will answer for the discretion of Mr. Barton and Mr. Fangle."

His apparent lack of passion infuriated Fred-

erick. "You will answer for yourself, when I call upon you," he cried.

"Certainly I will. But don't call upon me. I am not easily roused, but when roused I am dangerous." There was no possibility of mistaking the meaning of his words; they were uttered with a stern earnestness which contrasted powerfully with his previous light manner.

Frederick Chappell laughed scornfully, and approached Laura. As a stranger Richard Barton fell back from her, and Mr. Armstrong also stood a few paces away. Mr. Fangle felt himself in a dilemma; he desired, for prudential reasons, to keep friends with all parties, and he would gladly have given the sovereign he had borrowed from Mr. Armstrong if he could have made a sudden disappearance through the panels without any one being the wiser. As he could not escape, he was careful to see very little of the awkward scene.

"Be merciful," whispered Frederick to Laura, careful that only she should hear him; "and do not further humiliate me. It was the very madness of my love that caused me to act in a manner so displeasing to you. Say that you forgive me. Take my arm, and let me see you to the door. That is all I ask."

But she turned her face from him, and refused his offered arm.

During Frederick's last appeal to Laura, another actor appeared upon the scene. Rigby, the old hall-porter of the great firm of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell, had entered the room unobserved. The cruel blow which had fallen on the old man in his youth had stamped on his manner certain characteristics which it was too late to hope could ever be effaced. Every movement bespoke the humbleness which springs from the conviction that one is not worthy of respect. When he walked in the street, he walked close to the wall; when he spoke he never looked into the face of the person whom he addressed. If, by inadvertance he raised his eyes, he cast them quickly down, as though he had been guilty of an action which might be reasonably resented. And yet in his youth he had been conspicuous for manliness of character; when, however, the blow fell, and people marked him as the brother of a felon, he accepted his position, and yielded without a murmur. But as he entered the room now there was upon his features the same singular expression of mingled triumph and shame, pride and humiliation, which they had worn when he had solicited an interview with the head of the firm a couple of hours since. It expressed a struggle to lift himself out of the depth into which he had been plunged.

He had expected to find the banker alone in the room, and when he heard Frederick's voice he would have retreated in as silent a manner as he entered, had he not by chance seen the figures of Laura and Mr. Armstrong. Then he stood as though rooted to the spot.

"Come, Laura," said Mr. Armstrong, "we will go." But Frederick was between them. "You seem to forget, Mr. Chappell, that the lady has asked for my escort."

"And I have offered her mine."

"Which she refuses. Be careful, sir. You may try my patience too far."

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" cried Richard Barton, interposing, while Laura shrank back in terror.

"Be easy, Mr. Barton," said Mr. Armstrong. "There is only one person who has forgotten himself here."

"If you mean me, sir," exclaimed Frederick—but before another word had passed his lips, Rigby slid between the disputants. At sight of the old man, Mr. Armstrong took Richard Barton's arm, and stepped quietly on one side. There was something of caution expressed in the American's action.

Frederick Chappell glad that there was now some person in the room upon whom he could vent his passion with safety, savagely demanded of Rigby by what right he interposed.

"Have you anything to say to me?" asked Frederick.

"To you!" replied Rigby. "No, sir."

At the sound of his voice Laura raised her

head, and uttered an exclamation of mingled joy and dismay.

"Then what brings you here?" continued Frederick, with no abatement of his passion.

With a trembling hand Rigby offered the young man an envelope. "I have brought a check for your father, sir, in payment of an old debt."

Frederick Chappell angrily took the envelope, and threw it upon the table.

"I will give it to him. Well (for the old man showed no disposition to retire); "what are you waiting for? Leave the room."

"I think, sir," said Rigby, with a timid glance around, "that just now I have almost as much right here as you."

"You impertinent scoundrel! Are you in one of your drunken fits again?" He would have laid violent hands upon Rigby, but that Laura stepping swiftly forward, stood by the side of the old man and took his arm.

"Do you know who that man is," cried Frederick. "He is a common porter—a convict's brother?"

"He is my father!" said Laura, in a voice of great tenderness, with her arm around the old man's neck.

SCENE THE SECOND.

IN BELGRAVIA.

CHAPTER I.

RICHARD BARTON IS MADE A HERO OF AGAINST HIS WILL.

How Richard Barton got into society was a mystery to himself. Before he had been in London a fortnight he had made fifty fashionable acquaintances, and had exchanged cards with them. The name of Chappell was as potent in social as in commercial circles, and it was chiefly to Mr. Chappell senior that Richard was indebted for the most important introductions. This patronage, and the knowledge that he was wealthy, were sufficient recommendations, and he glided easily into the magic circle, and was cordially received and welcomed. Money and a good name will invariably bring about such a result, if you possess these requisites and desire to be so recognized. Men with much money, and not much character (of the proper sort), make great struggles to get into society—are making them to-day, but they rarely succeed. Society they get, and plenty of it, but not of the kind they yearn for. Poor, wretched mortals! How industriously they sow their cards, and what a questionable crop they reap! How few ears of healthy corn, and what a multitude of tares! Looking for an unblemished reputation among the guests who throng their assemblies is like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay.

To Mr. Armstrong Richard Barton was also indebted for the cordiality with which he was everywhere received. From the first hour of their introduction they seemed to be drawn together by kindred sympathies, and the foundation of a sincere friendship appeared to be firmly laid. The impulsive, generous nature of the young Australian was a pleasant experience to the more sober and somewhat caustic nature of the American.

"You are like spring," said the American, when he looked up from the morning papers one morning, and saw the bright, beaming face of Richard Barton. "It does one good to shake hands with you."

The young man blushed; this kind of praise from a man he had so much admired was very sweet to him.

"If but for one thing," he said, "I am glad that I came to England."

"You are going to pay me a compliment."

"I am going to speak the truth. You remind me of my father, whom I loved."

"Mr. Chappell tells me your parents are not living."

"My mother died when I was very young. It is more than twelve months since I lost my father. In all the Australian colonies—the seven South Sea sisters—I have not, to my knowledge,

a relative. If I had a brother, I should like him to resemble you."

"I am almost old enough to be your father. Come, let us stroll."

Such-like dialogues were not uncommon between them.

With Frederick Chappell, Richard was still, to outward observers, upon friendly terms. The scene that had taken place in the banker's room had set the stamp of a cold intimacy upon the relations between the two young men. Each entertained a contempt for the other. But the open expression of Frederick Chappell's sentiments was (as were his feelings toward Mr. Armstrong) restrained and kept in check by his father. Old Mr. Chappell, although he was much engrossed by his special anxieties and ambitions, was not an unobservant man, and he saw clearly that there was a lack of genuine cordiality between his son and the young Australian, and he saw, also, that Richard and Mr. Armstrong were becoming firm friends—a circumstance which was by no means pleasant to him. He spoke to his son on the matter.

"You and Mr. Barton do not seem to get along well together."

"He is a cad," said Frederick, with contemptuous emphasis.

This is a common fiction with many young gentlemen in society—young gentlemen who are looked upon as "swells" in the best sense of the word. Every man they do not like is pronounced a "cad," and this definition, in accordance with their code, effectually disposes of him, and establishes his character.

"He is necessarily ignorant," remonstrated Mr. Chappell, senior, "of the usages of society. I had hopes that you would be friends. It promised well."

"It isn't my fault," said Frederick; "I would have put myself out of the way to oblige you, although I don't care for him. And we might have got on fairly enough if we had not been interfered with."

"By whom?"

"Mr. Armstrong. You know my opinion of him."

Mr. Chappell senior frowned.

"They seem to hit it better than you have done, Frederick. It is most unfortunate, but it can't be helped, I suppose. But I lay my strict injunctions upon you. I will have no quarrelling. This young man is rich, and his connection with the bank may be advantageous. You must behave well to him."

"I will do my best, sir."

Frederick was always properly submissive to his father. He used to tell his acquaintances that he never said a word to make the governor turn rusty. In this he was wise in his generation, for he depended entirely upon his father, and had the supplies been stopped, even for a short time, it would have been awkward for him. The young fellow was in constant difficulties about money. Among the misfortunes by which he was afflicted was one which he had managed to keep from his father's knowledge. He was an inveterate gambler, and not a fortunate one. What gambler is, unless he be a thief or a bully? Place it to Frederick's credit that he was neither of these. A reference to this unfortunate infirmity (I use the mildest terms I can think of) was made by Mr. Armstrong in a conversation he had with Richard Barton two or three days after the scene in the bank parlor. While Frederick had his father at his elbow, warning him not to quarrel with the young Australian, Richard had a similar friend, in the person of Mr. Armstrong, at his elbow, working to the same end. Richard was for breaking, in the most unmistakable manner, with Frederick Chappell. Mr. Armstrong persuaded him to keep on ostensibly good terms with Frederick.

"There are other interests to bear in mind as well as our own," said the American. "A lady's name is mixed up in the affair, and the world is uncharitable. For her sake, then, we must be silent. You are not aware that Frederick Chappell has written her a letter of apology."

"No."

"I have seen it. He has had that grace. She would not have opened a letter from him—she knows his writing; he has written to her frequently—but that I was by her side when it was presented, and advised her to read it. He has been pestering her with his attentions for a long time. You will take my advice, also, I hope."

"Yes; if it is given seriously."

"In all seriousness, believe me. I don't ask you to be intimate with him, for I should not like to see that come about. I have a worse opinion of him than you have, and still we shake hands when we meet. He has been to me, in a certain way, a kind of study, and is not by any means a specialty. He is but the type of a class, members of which you may see loiter in the stalls of fashionable theaters any night in the week. There are thousands of useless, negatively good and negatively vicious young men like him knocking about London—young men whose connections are rich, and who, being badly reared, do not recognize that life has duties. They are morally behind, and to be of them you must deride goodness, and most especially, have a light opinion of women. But Master Frederick is playing with edged tools just now in other ways. He is a gambler of such a confirmed type that he would toss up for a five-pound note with Tom or Jerry. The consequence is that he is in the hands of the money-lenders, and is sometimes driven to his wits' ends—not far to go"—(this was accompanied by a light laugh)—"to meet their demands. There, you have a fair summing-up of his character. I have spoken plainly because I like you, and because I think"—here the American looked at Richard with good humored frankness and shrewdness—"that in the estimate I have formed of your character I am not mistaken."

"I hope you are not," said Richard, with a frank laugh, "if your estimate is a good one. Thank you for your advice, and I shall follow it."

"That is right. Perhaps you will wonder why, with these opinions, I keep on friendly terms with father or son. Well—I have my reasons. If I make you curious on this point you have retaliated, for you have made me curious about yourself. Since the little difference we had with Frederick Chappell you have been to his house?"

"Yes."

"And have accepted another invitation?"

"Yes."

"And have opened an account with the bank?"

"Yes," replied Richard, with a little awkwardness of manner. "I have my reasons as well as you. One day I may confide in you, but not at present. I have a task to perform first."

"Well, I will not intrude upon your confidence, but I think I may promise that you will find me your friend."

"Thank you."

Frederick Chappell's prediction that Richard Barton would, within a month of his introduction into society, be one of the principal lions in London, was to some extent verified. Stories of his wealth were whispered about, and, unlike the rolling stone, gathered moss. It grew day by day until it was multiplied by ten, at least, and he was reputed to be the possessor of millions. It is wonderful to observe how kind and gracious the world is to the fortunate. It smiled upon Richard whichever way he turned. Mothers looked at him with affectionate curiosity. The interesting millionaire was an orphan. Why should they not be a mother to him? Beauty smiled upon him, and danced with him, and went to dinners with him, hanging languishingly upon his arm, and pressed his hand with ever so slight a pressure, and did all that beauty could to make him understand how good and great and noble he was, and how ready beauty was to be his humble servant. He was introduced to lords and ladies, and it must be admitted that when he first pressed the tips of his fingers of a duchess, a thrill ran up the nerves of his arm and brought a sense of the

exalted honor into his face. He was asked all manner of questions as to Australia, as to his property there, as to how many hundreds of thousands of horned cattle he had; and when he laughingly answered that he had no property and no horned cattle and no sheep there, his denial was set down to modesty. Society settled it all for him, and conferred upon him cattle stations, with hundreds of miles of water frontage, over which roamed and prospered and multiplied vast herds and flocks of living beef and mutton. He was puzzled to know how all these unreal possessions came to be believed in, and was not aware that it was to Mr. Chappell, senior, he was indebted for this great increase of wealth. Even had he become aware that it was Mr. Chappell who set these stories a-rolling, he would have been puzzled to know the reason why. But we who are behind the scenes are not so ignorant, and we know that it was of immense service to the great banker. The young millionaire had deposited all his money with Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell—at least, so went the rumor. Mr. Chappell was his confidential adviser in all his speculations, for rumor had it that Richard Barton was a speculator, and a shrewd one, and that he scorned to wrap up his money and keep it warm in the invalid blankets of the three-and-a-half-per-cents. He was a man of mettle and enterprise, and fashion bowed and intellect opened its arms to him. When the world sets up an idol, it paints it in rare colors, and invests it with rare virtues. Every day some new grace was betowed upon the young Australian; every day some new story was circulated to shed fresh luster upon him.

He himself was not aware of the extent of his popularity, and was blind to the traps which beauty set for him. It was for this reason, perhaps, that he escaped the snares. Had he seen them he would have been intensely uncomfortable; as it was, he was intensely happy. Mr. Armstrong laughed at him and with him about the stories that were set afloat.

"I contradict them," said Richard, "but I am not believed."

"All the better for you," replied Mr. Armstrong. "Never dispute with the world when it speaks well of you. Time enough to do that when it speaks ill. Though then it is breath wasted. The world will have its way."

But excited and pleased as Richard Barton was with these new and flattering experiences, he found his sweetest pleasures outside the charmed circle of the fashionable world. He was in love, and not with one of the darlings of the upper ten.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH SOME COMMON PERSONS ARE INTRODUCED, AND SUMMARILY DISMISSED.

OF course you know with whom. There has been as yet but one lady introduced in these pages, and I do not intend that there shall be any mystery in the affair. He was in love with Laura. These were early days to speak of his passion, and he had not yet deliberately questioned his heart. That he became a frequent visitor at the house in which Laura and her father lived was due in the first instance to the friendly offices of Mr. Armstrong. Independent, however, of the mediation of the American gentleman, he would have found his way there, for another reason which will before long be made apparent. But it was the American who first introduced him, and who behind his back spoke good words of him to Laura, and who behind her back spoke good words of her to Richard. To me, many of our most popular proverbs have always appeared false—for the reason, most likely, that they are the outcome of cynicism and ill-nature. That listeners never hear good of themselves would have been in this case falsified had either Laura or Richard played the part when Mr. Armstrong spoke of one to the other. You may be disposed to give the American gentleman the credit of being more than usually generous, and to set down

the falsifying of the proverb to this exceptional cause. I shall not argue with you upon the point, for I like my American.

In truth, he was most anxious to prove to Richard how thoroughly blameless Laura was in the matter of the interview between her and Frederick Chappell, and very soon after the occurrence he proposed to take Richard to her house, intending that Richard should see her in her domestic capacity. Richard was delighted at the opportunity, and received a modest and kindly welcome from both Laura and her father. They lived in a small house in the suburbs of London, and everything in and about it was neat and cheerful and homely; as is always the case when there is a good woman in a home. I ought to erase the last sentence, for I intended that Laura's character should speak for itself; but not much harm is done, so I shall let the words stand.

"Mr. Armstrong's friends are ours," said Laura, looking with affection upon the American, who never, in her presence, indulged in caustic speech.

"If I were a great man and a vain one," said Mr. Armstrong, "I should ask Laura to be my biographer. My vanity would be amply gratified."

Laura smiled sweetly yet gravely, and the conversation diverged into other than personal matters.

Before he left, Richard asked to be allowed to call again. He did not meet with a refusal, and after that he found his way to the house frequently. He made another acquaintance there—Mrs. Fangle, a pale, sad-eyed little woman, who, Richard learned, was Laura's constant companion when she went to the theater.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting your husband," said Richard to Mrs. Fangle.

Mrs. Fangle sighed, and sighed the more when Richard asked how the invention was progressing. By the merest accident he discovered where Mrs. Fangle lived. He saw her come out of a mean-looking house, and to her evident confusion he asked her if she lived there. She answered in the affirmative, but she seemed so much distressed and so anxious not to pursue the subject, that Richard, out of pity for her, did not continue his inquiries. But it surprised him to know that Mr. Fangle, who talked so confidently of being a millionaire, should reside in such a locality and such a house. He thought of the many instances he had read of genius struggling to make its way in the midst of poverty, and he entertained a sincere pity for the sad-eyed little woman. Wishing to befriend her, he inquired of the neighbors—in a delicate way, you may be sure (but I am inclined to regard his conduct as somewhat mean, for what business had he to be poking his nose into other people's affairs?)—as to her condition, and was amazed at the information he received. The house, it seemed, was Mr. Fangle's, and Mrs. Fangle "let to lodgers," as a neighbor said. She "let to lodgers" to such an extent, and there was apparently so great a demand for rooms in her house, that she, and Mr. Fangle, and the children, all lived in the kitchen. The name of the little Fangles was legion. Richard never seemed to get to the end of them. They were all little, and all dirty, and were always playing in the street—choosing the gutter, of course, as affording the most scope for pure enjoyment. I think Providence must have invented gutters solely for the amusement of the poor children of civilized nations; a prodigious amount of infantile pleasure is extracted from mud. Which induces the reflection (not original) that nothing in the world is made in vain. Everything has its beneficent use and purpose.

Richard made the acquaintance of the Fangle children in this wise: on his second visit to the neighborhood, he found the street in commotion. A child had, by some mysterious and ingenious means, got her head under a gate, which was locked. Having got thus far she could not get farther, and could not draw back, and was in a fair way of strangling herself. When Richard

appeared upon the scene, the excitement was at its height. Some of the neighbors had tried to push the child forward, some had tried to draw her out, and the limbs and head of the little thing had suffered in these attempts. Cooler and more sensible than the well-meaning crowd which had gathered round the child, Richard sent at once for a blacksmith; this artisan soon pried up the bar which imprisoned the child, who was released, after all, with very little damage. Richard then learned that the child was a Fangle, and seeing her soon afterward in the center of a group of small children who were listening to an enjoyable recital of her woes, and receiving from her hands infinitesimal portions of sweet stuff which Richard had bought for her, he learned that they were all Fangles. "Lord knows how many there is of 'em!" said the sweet-stuff woman. When Mrs. Fangle arrived home, Richard was in the house with her children, whom he had made happy, all around him. Mrs. Fangle turned red and white at sight of him, and her eyes reproached him for intruding upon her poverty.

"I hope you will forgive me," he said, with a smile, and in a tone which Mrs. Fangle afterward declared to Laura, when she related the incident, were the sweetest and gentlest she had ever seen and heard. "It is not out of impertinent curiosity that I am here."

Then he narrated the particulars of the juvenile Fangle's perils with such effect that the little ones, who followed his words with staring eyes and open mouths, did not know whether to laugh or to cry. His kindness and delicacy during this interview made so deep an impression upon Mrs. Fangle, that within a few minutes she was sobbing for joy, and all the little Fangles were howling in sympathy. From that day Mrs. Fangle was bound to him heart and soul, and never missed an opportunity to sound his praises.

I feel that an apology is due from me for introducing such low and common persons as Mrs. Fangle's dirty children in a story which treats of rank and fashion. I have no intention of continuing their history, and I make the best amends in my power by dismissing them at once from the scene, and by promising that they shall be heard of no more. I take the opportunity of remarking that you would be surprised if you were made acquainted with the domestic lives of many of the men of genius (you see that I take Mr. Fangle at his own valuation) whom possibly you may admire. Before I became as wise as I am at this present time of writing, I used to wonder why the great author, Mr. Dash, and the great dramatist, Mr. Blank, with whom I am very intimate, never invited me to their houses, and never introduced me to their wives. I meet them at clubs, entertainments, and cozy little dinners, but I am not on speaking terms with their wives and families. I wonder now no more. I have heard things, and I—hold my tongue.

Well, then, I promise that you shall see no more of the Fangle children. But I cannot make the same promise with respect to Mrs. Fangle. She has to play her part, and we shall meet her in fashionable circles. For her appearance there Mr. Armstrong is responsible. He, as well as Richard, was her friend, and presently, when Laura received an unexpected invitation to a grand entertainment, Mrs. Fangle was invited to accompany her. Mr. Armstrong delighted to throw dust into the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Chappell, for it was from this lady that the invitation came to Laura and her father. That any one of these three persons should have been invited to one of Mrs. Chappell's assemblies was in itself surprising, but the expression of Mr. Armstrong's wish that cards should be sent to them was not to be disregarded. When the subject was mooted, Frederick Chappell supported it warmly, for it would give him an opportunity of seeing Laura, of whom he was more than ever enamored. Mrs. Chappell was inclined to refuse, but her husband had promised Mr. Armstrong that it should be done, and he was firm. Had his lady known the exact circumstances of Mrs. Fangle's home-life, she would

have been furious, and justly indignant, but Mr. Armstrong discreetly allowed her to remain in blissful ignorance upon the point; in secret, he had many a sly laugh over it.

I have said that Mrs. Fangle was bound to Richard heart and soul, and it was not long before she discovered that he was in love with Laura. Like a good and kind woman she assisted him by every means in her power, without his knowing it, without his even suspecting that any person could possibly have a suspicion of the state of his feelings—perhaps before he was fully aware of them himself. Mrs. Fangle was constantly at Laura's house, being indeed paid secretly by Mr. Armstrong to act as a kind of companion to the young girl, and she gave Laura and Richard every opportunity of being alone together. When Richard called, she always had something to do in another part of the house, and when he was gone she was never weary of talking about him—about his goodness, his love for children, his manliness, his good looks, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. She never spoke of his money; she knew Laura too well to introduce that as a favorable feature. She noted Laura's silence and Laura's blushes with delight, and was satisfied that all was going along splendidly, and that the young couple would soon be avowed lovers. "I know the signs," she thought to herself. But although she did not speak of Richard's wealth, Laura did once to her, in confidence.

"He's very rich," said Laura, "is he not?"

"I have heard so, my dear," replied Mrs. Fangle, cautiously.

"And very generous," added Laura.

"That I am sure of, my dear. A more generous heart does not beat."

"Generous enough, do you think, to do a strange and noble action?"

"Nothing would be too good and noble for him to do," said Mrs. Fangle, with secret wonder. She did not know in what current Laura's thoughts were wandering.

"A wonderful piece of good fortune has come to my father lately," said Laura, "and I have thought—I have hoped"—

What she thought and hoped she did not explain in words. Yet presently when she looked up, somewhat shyly, into Mrs. Fangle's face, that worthy woman said, with a significant and tender smile.

"I shouldn't wonder, my dear, if you were right."

And then she kissed Laura. What caused Laura to blush is beyond my ken; but women often speak to each other in this kind of language.

Mrs. Fangle knew from personal observation that a great change for the better had taken place in the circumstances of her friends, and, being a curious little body, had speculated as to the means by which the change had been brought about. She was not able to arrive at a satisfactory solution, and as she could not repress her curiosity, she threw out hints to Laura's father that she was prepared to receive his confidence. But Rigby shook his head.

"It is a secret between me and another person," he said.

Even after the conversation with Laura, Mrs. Fangle was no wiser as to the particulars; but she had discovered who the hero was, and she became more than ever enthusiastic on the subject of Richard Barton.

CHAPTER III.

"WHO COULD HAVE SENT ME THESE BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS?"

I AM tempted to introduce still a few more words which passed between Mr. Armstrong and Richard Barton on the first day of their acquaintance. It will be remembered that on that day Frederick Chappell had proposed to take Richard behind the scenes of a theater, and that Richard had eagerly accepted the offer. Savage and sullen, however, at the unfavorable light in which he had been placed in the scene with Laura, Frederick did not make his appearance at Richard's hotel in the after-

noon. Both Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Fangle were there, Richard having invited them to dinner. Over the dinner the subject was introduced, and Richard expressed his disappointment.

"You would really like to go?" questioned the American.

"Indeed I should," was Richard's reply.

"I will take you, then."

"Behind the scenes!" cried Mr. Fangle. "May I come?"

"Yes," said Mr. Armstrong. "Who knows? You might introduce some improvement in the present style of acting."

"Certainly I might. Thank you for the hint. It will bear improving. Splendid idea!"

"Don't say that to any of the actresses, Mr. Fangle, or they'll box your ears."

"Box my ears!" exclaimed Mr. Fangle, so ready to agree with his patron on any point that he scarcely knew what he said. "Certainly—certainly. Splendid idea!"

Whereat they all had a merry laugh, in which Mr. Fangle, primed with wine and a good dinner, was not the least animated participant.

Mr. Armstrong took them behind the scenes of the theater in which Laura was acting.

"Queer place!" said Mr. Fangle, after a little while. "Very kind of you, upon my word, to be so obliging as to bring me here. I never was behind the scenes before in all my life. Queer people, too—very queer." (Mr. Fangle was not aware that his wife acted as Laura's companion. Mrs. Fangle was compelled to do many things without the knowledge of her husband, to support her too-numerous brood, and it was fortunate for her that she was out of the way on this occasion of his visit behind the scenes.)

"A kind of loose fish, eh?" said Mr. Armstrong, in his usual vein of irony.

"Quite so—quite so," assented Mr. Fangle, with enthusiastic enjoyment, not seeing the trap which was open to receive him.

"As to their morals, I mean."

"Certainly—certainly. That's my meaning, too. Our views are the same."

"But," said Mr. Armstrong, "I am bound to confess that there are a few good persons to be met with occasionally upon the stage, and that there is a little goodness and virtue still remaining among them."

Then Richard said, very earnestly, "Mr. Armstrong, may I take the liberty of asking if you are serious?"

"In saying that there is still a little virtue to be found among these people? Certainly I am."

"No, not alone in that; but serious in your remarks generally? There is a vein of sarcasm in your manner that puzzles me, and I sometimes doubt whether you really mean what you say. Remember that I am a stranger in a new world, and excuse my freedom in putting so blunt a question to you."

The genuine earnestness and simplicity of the young Australian had their effect upon Mr. Armstrong, and thereafter—during that night at least—there was no irony in his words.

On another occasion, when the subject of conversation was the difference of manners in national character, Richard remarked that, were it not for the slightest peculiarity in the modulation of Mr. Armstrong's voice, he should scarcely take him for an American. Mr. Armstrong replied, with apparent carelessness, but with sincere meaning:

"You have repeated in a more graceful form what I have heard from many Englishmen, who are astonished that I do not chew tobacco, that I do not make a spittoon of the carpet, that I do not swear, that I do not comport myself in some absurd, eccentric fashion, and who truly believe that I am not a genuine specimen of my race because I behave in a rational manner, and have a hearty contempt for humbug and injustice."

This kind of conversation strengthened the bond of union between the two men, and it was not long before they arrived at a proper understanding and appreciation of each other. To

Richard, indeed, it seemed as though he had known Mr. Armstrong for years. But other men and other matters also claimed his attention. Within a month of his arrival in London he found himself sailing on a full wave of popularity. He enjoyed it, and when new friends and acquaintances pressed about him with their flatteries and compliments, and he was surrounded by glare and glitter, he gave himself up to the charm, as youth does naturally and invariably when the opportunity offers. The world had never been so bright to him, and he freely accepted the enjoyments it held out to him. Mr. Armstrong took note, with affectionate interest, of the experiences through which Richard was passing, and of his manner of receiving them. At first he was doubtful whether the adulation which was showered upon the young fellow would not turn his head; but after a time he became more satisfied, and contented himself with gentle railery, which Richard took in good part. It was usual for Richard to call upon Mr. Armstrong in the morning three or four times during the week. Upon one of these occasions, when Richard had invited himself to breakfast, Mr. Armstrong asked him if he had any thing particular to do for the next few hours. Richard answered, No.

"I did not know," said the American, "what demands upon his time the spoiled child of fashion might have."

"Not spoiled yet," said Richard, with a smile.

"Society is somewhat of a tyrant, and jealous withal. You still find its bonds pleasant?"

"Very pleasant."

"And have no cravings for the age of simplicity to come over again?" Richard shook his head. "You will be wiser when you are thirty years older. You will then discover the vanity of things."

"I will wait till then."

"I heard yesterday that you had taken a large number of shares in the Great Extended Copper Mine. Is it a fact, or merely rumor?"

"I have taken five hundred shares."

"By Mr. Chappell's advice?"

"He introduced the company to my notice. I can't exactly say that he advised me to take shares."

"You have been guided by me in many matters. Be guided in this. The shares will be at a premium to-day and to-morrow. Sell out to-morrow."

"I haven't the slightest objection. I know you never speak without reason."

"Why do you speculate at all just now, Richard?"

"Why does Frederick Chappell bet on horse-racing? It is in my blood, I suppose. But have no fear. My eyes are open."

"I wish you would make a confidant of me in your speculations."

"I will do so with pleasure. Why did you want to know if I had any thing particular to do to-day?"

"I am going to see a young friend of ours, and I shall be glad of your company. It is a fine morning, and we can walk."

Richard's heart beat more quickly; he knew that the young friend was Laura.

On their way they spoke of her, and Mr. Armstrong mentioned that he had received a note from Laura's father, which he made the pretext for this visit. Mrs. Fangle opened the door for them.

"Dear me!" she said. "We were just speaking of you. Now I know why you two gentlemen have come in company."

"Then you are indeed a wise woman," said Mr. Armstrong.

"You have come to wish her many happy returns of the day."

"Why of this particular day?"

"Because it is Laura's birthday. She is twenty to-day."

"I assure you we were ignorant of it, but we are both glad we have come."

They found Laura and her father together, and they offered her their congratulations.

"It is an important day to us in more re-

spects than one," said Laura. "We have received an invitation, and we are puzzled what answer to return to it."

"I see that you want my opinion," said Mr. Armstrong. "Be thankful that I am not a lawyer. What invitation is it, and from whom?"

"From Mrs. Chappell, and to a grand party. For papa and me."

"And you wish me to tell you whether you shall accept it?"

"Yes."

"Accept it by all means."

Had she only her own feelings to consult, Laura would have been thankful if Mr. Armstrong had advised her to decline the invitation. She had many reasons for wishing this; she was anxious not to meet Frederick Chappell, and she knew how wide a gulf there was between her position and that of Mrs. Chappell. She thought her father would be disinclined to go, but, to her surprise, when she spoke of the matter to him, he showed a nervous eagerness to be received as a guest in the house of his late employer. It was, indeed, to him in some sense a vindication in the eyes of the world; he proposed, however, that it should be left to Mr. Armstrong's decision, and when that decision was given unhesitatingly in accordance with his wish, he gazed with love and pride upon his daughter. It was for her sake, as well as for his own, that he desired to go; it had been agonizing to him to think that his shame was reflected upon her. Now all this was cleared away, and he and the child who had been his only solace during his long years of suffering, would be able to hold up their heads with the best. Laura was no longer an actress; she had, under the more favorable circumstances of their position, left the stage, intending never to return to it.

"Of course I shall do as you advise," she said to Mr. Armstrong. "Will you be there?"

"Yes, and Mr. Barton also."

"Then I shall not be without friends; yet it seems so strange to me to receive such an invitation, that I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake."

"That's scarcely probable. Perhaps they know that Mr. Barton and you are friends, and are anxious in this way to show their respect for him. Mr. Barton, let me tell you, is a person of some importance in society." He said this in a very kind tone.

Laura looked gratefully at Richard, and the American gentleman was quite contented that she should believe that it was to Richard's good office she owed this mark of respect. It did not matter that Richard disclaimed any previous knowledge of it; he was not believed—by one of the party at least.

Some little while after the two gentlemen had taken their departure, a bouquet of choice flowers was left at the house of Laura. Mrs. Fangle ran into the room with them in a state of great excitement, holding the flowers behind her. Ordinarily, Mrs. Fangle was a sad and quiet little woman; she had reached this state gradually but very surely, for when she was young she was a merry-hearted girl, full of life and animation; but an overdose of Fangle had changed her nature completely. Occasionally, however, the old lively spirit—which lay buried beneath the cares and worries of the world—peeped out as in the present instance. She held the flowers behind her, and merrily asked Laura to guess what she had brought her. Laura's delight was unbounded when she saw the flowers. It was a day of glad surprises for her.

"Who could have sent them?" she said.

"Papa," suggested Mrs. Fangle, slyly.

"Of course—papa," cried Laura.

"Of course—papa!" repeated Mrs. Fangle, mockingly. "Papa is in the garden. Go and ask him."

"Thank you, papa," said Laura, kissing the old man.

"For what, my dear?"

"For these flowers. Are they not beautiful?"

"Very beautiful. But they are not from me, my dear."

Later in the day Mrs. Fangle surprised the young girl gazing at the flowers, with a soft and tender light of happiness in her eyes.

"Who could have sent me these beautiful flowers?" exclaimed Mrs. Fangle, gayly, quoting from the "Lady of Lyons." And for the second time during the week she kissed Laura significantly, and again Laura blushed. No happier heart than hers beat that day in all the wide world.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. CHAPPELL'S PARTY.

RANK, fashion, and intellect were always to be found at Mrs. Chappell's parties, and at the party to which Laura and her father were invited there was a more than usually select and brilliant gathering. The occasion was an important one, for Mr. Chappell could now write M. P. after his name, having been elected for Burlingham. There had been a severe contest for the representation of the borough, but from the first Mr. Wakefield, the Parliamentary agent, had been confident of victory. "Leave everything to me," Mr. Wakefield had said, "and I will pull you through." Mr. Chappell had left everything to his agent, and was duly pulled through; all that he had to do was to ask no questions, to advance money as it was required, and to make a few set speeches. Mr. Wakefield did all the rest, and Mr. Chappell paid the piper. When he footed up the figures he was rather serious, but he cheered up presently, and consoled himself with the reflection that the money was well spent. To his wife the triumph was greater than it was to him. The Opposition candidate was her next door neighbor, Mr. Mercer, to whom slight reference has been made in the early part of the story, and who had risen from nothing. "A nobody," said Mrs. Chappell, "whose wife used to sell caps and dresses, and who has made his money Heaven knows how! We must teach these persons a lesson." The lesson had been taught, at a somewhat expensive rate, but Mr. Mercer did not seem much the worse of it. No doubt, however, he suffered in secret, said Mrs. Chappell. The wives took much more interest in the contest than their husbands. They looked daggers at each other, but spoke none, not being on speaking terms. There was talk of a petition against the new member on the usual grounds of bribery and corruption; Mr. Wakefield snapped his fingers and defied the defeated candidate, who very wisely saved his time and his purse.

Mrs. Chappell was not only a fashionable but an ambitious woman, and she thought, now that her husband was a member of Parliament, that she saw her way clear to becoming Lady Chappell. In secret, she wrote the name frequently, to see how it looked, always tearing up the paper carefully into very small pieces, after she had indulged in this airy realization of her ambition. On the day that Mr. Chappell was returned for Burlingham, when she received the telegram announcing his victory, she opened her desk and began to scribble, "Lady Chappell presents her compliments;" "Lady Chappell has much pleasure;" "Lady Chappell. At home;" "Believe me, very sincerely yours, Lady Harriet Chappell"—no, that would not do; why should she not put M. P.'s after her name? It was not right that custom should deprive her of her honors. She destroyed two or three quires of note-paper in this way, and when the footman came into the room, was inclined to be angry with him because he did not say "My lady."

With Mr. Chappell affairs had been going on in the usual way since our introduction to him. He suffered a great deal, but did not let the world see it. His speculations were not turning out fortunately, but little bits of luck occasionally came to him, and kept up his spirits. His chief concern was still the safety of the *Golden Mariner*, in which he had so large a stake. Nothing had been heard of the vessel, and the ominous silence that prevailed regarding it was almost worse than bad news. He had tried to insure a part, nay, the whole of his risk, and had failed, so that he was compelled to stand or fall by the ship. The extent of his interest in the *Golden Mariner* was not generally known;

Mr. Armstrong and himself were the only persons who knew the full particulars of his transactions in that direction, and he hoped that the American, for his own sake, would not speak of the matter. Mr. Chappell was very polite, and attended to Mr. Armstrong, and did not, even to his wife, exhibit aversion to him. Mrs. Chappell herself liked the American gentleman, and was strongly attracted toward him for one special reason. She was much interested in spiritualism, and she believed in her heart that Mr. Armstrong was a spiritualist, and could enlighten her on the subject. When she referred to it, he generally evaded it; in truth, he was to a certain extent a believer in mesmerism, but he did not parade his belief. There were other reasons for Mrs. Chappell's liking for him; he was rich, handsome, clever and most attentive to ladies; besides the tone of his remarks gave a piquancy generally to the conversation, and she knew how important it was that her company should be amused. Then, again, she liked all persons who were both clever and rich.

When Richard Barton made his appearance in Mrs. Chappell's brilliant reception-rooms, the guests were arriving in quick succession, and the scene was very animated. He looked about him for Mr. Armstrong and Laura, but neither had yet arrived. Mrs. Chappell was conversing with Lady Barebones, who, with her three marriageable daughters, had a remarkable regard for eligible single young men.

"Here is a great favorite of mine," said Mrs. Chappell, "a young Australian, enormously rich, only lately arrived home."

"I have heard of him," observed Lady Barebones, putting up her eyeglass at Richard, who was slowly making his way toward the lady of the house. "Single?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Chappell, who, having no daughters of her own, could afford to be generous. "Single and disengaged. I do not know how many thousands of miles of sheep runs and cattle stations he is the owner of. I am told there is no end to his money."

The hearts of the three honorable Misses Barebones fluttered in their breasts, and when Richard was introduced to them, they made the most gracious of courtesies. Lady Barebones took him in at a glance, and settled his fate for him. He should marry Millicent. I should be afraid to say how many men Lady Barebones had settled should marry Millicent; yet Millicent was still a spinster. Lady Barebones was not a good general; she took possession of the men at once, and frightened them by her violent method. She would have married them to her girls by force if she had had the power. Those who had experience of her took care to keep their distance. The young ladies were not remarkable for beauty, nor were they rich in the world's goods. Richard, however, was unconscious of Lady Barebones's intentions, and presently found himself in conversation with Mr. Forman, with whom he had some slight acquaintance. Mr. Forman was a rising lawyer, with a brother in the colonies, and the conversation was therefore interesting to both the gentlemen. Richard was satisfied to be thus employed until the arrival of his friends, and he stationed himself near the door, so that he might see them enter.

"A strange case has come under my notice lately," said Mr. Forman, "in connection with New South Wales. A very wealthy gentleman there, whose name it is not necessary to mention, being anxious to visit England, for the purpose of settling here with his family, I believe, consulted my brother—knowing that I am a lawyer—as to the best means of accomplishing his wish. You will understand that when he was a young man he was transported for life. He is now old and very wealthy, and the desire to come home is like a disease in him. For the last three years letters have been passing between us on the subject, but of course nothing can be done. I believe the old man would give fifty thousand pounds if it could be managed. To satisfy him, I have made inquiries and applications with no successful result. From a letter

which reached me last week, I learn that the disappointment is likely to be the death of the man. 'Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage,' and yet a country as large as Europe may become a hateful prison when you are forbidden to move out of it. Is it not so?"

"It is so."

Richard Barton moved away with a strange thoughtfulness upon him. The words the lawyer had spoken recalled him to the duty which lay before him. He had not forgotten the purpose which had brought him to England—it was impossible that he could ever lose sight of it; but during the five weeks he had been in the country he had not prosecuted his inquiries with energy. He reproached himself for it now. Certainly he had not been idle, something he had discovered, and it had brought a sweet pleasure to him in the promise it held forth. And there was an excuse for him in the temptations by which he had been surrounded. But he would waste no more time in idle pleasures. A great duty was before him, and he would set to work upon it at once.

In the midst of these reflections, a hand was placed upon his shoulder. He turned, and saw Mr. Armstrong.

"I have been looking for you," said the American. "Have you been here long?"

"About half an hour."

"We have a grand company here to-night. But two-thirds of them will be gone in an hour or so. There are two great balls elsewhere to which most of those present are invited, I expect. See—a few are clearing away already."

"Laura has not arrived yet?"

"No; she and her father will come in a few minutes. I thought it best that they should not be here too early. It is a trying ordeal for the old man to pass through, and Laura herself has been very nervous over the affair. Hark! the Hungarian band is playing in the garden. Mrs. Chappell's parties are always worth attending. You may be sure of the best of everything—the best wines, the best company, the best singing. The Swedish quartette music, are here; some of their glees are very suggestive. It was a good idea of Mrs. Chappell's to station the Hungarian musicians in the gardens. It is a lovely night; let us walk into the grounds. The music of these Hungarians is very distinctive. There is something wild and heroic in it, and if you look upon the musicians while they are playing, its character is not destroyed. See how the leader stamps his feet, and flourishes his bow. His body sways in unison with the strains. He feels what he is playing. Confess, my young barbarian. Is not this worth coming to London for? The lights, the music, the beauty, the murmur of soft voices, the thousand and one fascinations that conspire to lure one's senses, and steep them in a heaven of happiness. Presented to us in such a scene are all the brilliant facets of human nature, shining and sparkling like stars. Not to be seen and not to be enjoyed anywhere but in a large city. You are silent. Do you not agree with me?"

"Yes," replied Richard, abstractedly. "You are right."

He scarcely followed his friend's words; his mind was filled with but one subject. His thoughtfulness and abstraction were not lost upon Mr. Armstrong, who, however, made no open comment upon it.

"You see dark clouds in the picture, probably," proceeded Mr. Armstrong, "but why should they disturb us? Let us enjoy the outside of things. I confess that there are occasions when it pleases me to look no deeper. There are perils and worse than perils standing on the outskirts of this paradise, we know; but we are here—let us enjoy it. I like to see human nature dressed in its best, as it is to-night. I like to see it when it is on its good behavior, nestling prettily in smiles and bright looks and pleasant speech. These fascinating experiences must have brought a new sensation to you."

"They have, and one so enthralling that I begin to fear I have been unwise in yielding to it."

"You will singe your wings to a certainty, if you have not done so already. Be thankful if you do not burn them off. Listen—the Swedish girls are singing."

They stood in silence until the glee was finished.

"Neither of us understand a word of the language," said the American, "and yet I make a story out of the song. Standing here in the garden, I imagine that at a little distance from us—there where the shadows are—stands a beleaguered city. The inhabitants have risen in its defense, and every man is a soldier, armed with rude weapons. The besieging army lies before it, and around it. The defenders watch through the night. It is dark, and they pass their signals from one to the other. The women within the city listen to the sounds of their men's voices; the children in their beds hold their breath. 'How goes it?' asks a citizen-soldier. 'All is still,' answers another; 'our foe sleeps; we hear no sounds. Pass the word.' Sentinel speaks to sentinel, and the words, 'All is still; we hear no sounds; our foe is sleeping,' travel onward, until they die away in the distance. The glad tidings breathe comfort into the hearts of the women and children; their protectors are on the alert, and all may yet be well. The brief silence that follows the last dying strains of the sentinels is broken by the sweet night-song of the women, praying for their men and their land. The wives pray for their husbands; the girls for their lovers. The citizen-soldiers, in their turn, listen to the prayer. 'Sleep in peace,' they sing, when the prayer is ended; 'we watch over you and our children.' 'God protect you,' reply the women. 'Good-night.' 'Good-night.'

CHAPTER V.

SECRET FOR SECRET.

RICHARD listened to this description with wonder and delight. It was to him a new revelation in the character of his friend.

"You have charmed me out of myself," he said. "I am ashamed to confess that while those girls were singing I paid no heed to them. My thoughts were wandering to past times and distant lands, but your words brought every note of the song back to me."

"I charmed you out of yourself," repeated Mr. Armstrong. "Do you believe in mesmerism?"

"No."

"At least in animal magnetism—a more comprehensible term?"

"I believe in nothing of the kind. Do you?"

"Yes; to a certain extent, I have some faith in it."

"Had any person but yourself told me so, I should have doubted him."

"Why? Perhaps you have not given any serious thought to the subject. When I speak with more than usual earnestness, do you not listen with more than usual attention?"

"Undoubtedly."

"That is animal magnetism. I impress you with my earnestness. I did so by my description of the Swedish girls' glee, and I succeeded in my distinct intention to divert your thoughts from the current in which they were running. I don't go far; table-talking, spirit-rapping, and spiritualism—which are at present the property of charlatans and dupes—I have no belief in."

"Nor I, in those or any other quackeries. My wonder is that sensible men are gulled."

"All sensible men are not gulled; some few are. There never yet was a delusion without its followers. I have seen cleverer men than either you or I sent into a mesmeric sleep, about the genuineness of which there could be no question."

"I stand by my opinion; it is a delusion from first to last."

"You prick me. I should like the opportunity of convincing you."

"I offer it to you," said Richard; "mesmerize me."

"If there has been a time," said Mr. Armstrong, with a smile, "within our acquaintance when you would be a favorable subject for mesmerism it is now, for I see plainly that you are excited. But I doubt if under any circumstances you could be affected according to the popular mode. You are too full of healthy blood; your mind is not sufficiently diseased; you are not morbid. I know of no especial weakness in you that could be worked upon."

"Ah, you want something of that sort. Ignorance, credulity, imbecility—these are your mesmerists' foundations."

Mr. Armstrong looked at Richard with closer attention.

"Has anything gone wrong with you?"

"No."

"You have heard no bad news?"

"No."

"You said just now that you feared you were unwise in yielding to the attractions which society has held out to you. Have you not found them pleasant?"

"Very pleasant."

"Yet you are disturbed and excited, apparently without cause. I am almost tempted to make a shrewd guess that you are in love. Are you?"

Richard stammered confusedly, "Yes—no—that is"—

Mr. Armstrong laughed in a kindly manner. "A sure sign," he said, and added, earnestly, "whoever she is, may she be worthy of you!"

"She's more than my equal," replied Richard, softly; "wish rather that I may be worthy of her. And you, Armstrong? I have read somewhere that love comes to all men. You have moved much in the world. How is it that you have escaped?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Armstrong, sententiously, "it is because I have moved much in the world that I have escaped."

"No, it is not because of that. I am beginning to know you, Armstrong. Those words are not from your heart."

Mr. Armstrong did not immediately reply, and when he spoke his voice was low and tender. "I am corrected; the subject is too sacred for light speech. Secret for secret, Richard; I have not escaped. Love comes to all men, you say. After all these years it has come to me, and, cynic and old worldling as I am, it has brought into my life its sweetest promise. I live in the hope of a happy future with the best and purest woman I have ever known."

Richard held out his hand with cordial affection. "I am rejoiced to hear it. But I must not allow my dream of love to cause me to forget the task, to perform which I came to this new world. A few words which were addressed to me to-night suddenly recalled me to a sense of my duty—a stern and sacred duty, Armstrong—and I was reproaching myself for neglecting it when you came upon me."

"Can I assist you in any way?"

"You can, I think. With the exception of a few words which passed between me and Mr. Chappell, this is the only time that I have spoken openly since my arrival in England, and you must forgive me for my excitement. You shall know all, Armstrong; I can trust you and depend upon you, for you are a just man. Before we part to-night I will tell you my story. It is a story of bitter, cruel injustice committed upon—upon my father, a man whom, if you had known, you would have loved and respected, as all did who knew him. It is to remove a stain from his memory—for he is dead—that I am in England. Singularly enough, the story of this bitter wrong is connected with the very bank of which Mr. Chappell is the head. When I was making arrangements for leaving the colony, it seemed to me like a decree of fate that I should be advised by my best friend there to come straight to Mr. Chappell's bank."

"You have had some conversation with Mr. Chappell upon the subject? He knows your story, then, and your purpose?"

"He knows nothing. Not a word of explanation has passed my lips, and the secret is mine and will be mine until we leave to-night."

The first thing I have to do is to discover what has become of a man who was a clerk in Mr. Chappell's bank."

"What is his name?"

"Charles Davidge."

In his excitement, Richard did not see the startled look that flashed into Mr. Armstrong's eyes, nor hear the exclamation that escaped his lips.

"I must find this Charles Davidge, if he be alive. My fear is that he may be dead. Armstrong, there are good reasons why I cannot go to Mr. Chappell and ask him openly for information concerning this man. In return he would ask me for particulars which must not be known until I have accomplished my task. But if this Davidge be alive, I will track him. I would give half my fortune to meet him face to face! I would give all my fortune to wring confession from his lips! You will help me?"

"Yes, when I hear the full particulars of your story. Not until then, for I never work in the dark."

"I do not ask you to do so until you hear my story. But that I have a purpose in remaining here for a little while, I would beg of you to come away at once, so that I might relate it to you. I would tell it to you now if it were not too long; and I must tell it my own way, and without fear of interruption."

"What was the nature of the conversation that passed between you and Mr. Chappell?"

"I simply told him that my principal reason for coming to England was to correct a mistake which Justice made. I told him also, that in the performance of my task I might ask for his assistance, and he promised to give it to me."

"That is all?"

"That is all. Now advise me in what way I shall commence. I thought of putting the matter into the hands of private detectives, but the idea seemed to me revolting. It is a degradation to have to do with hired spies. And I had another objection: I did not wish to tell my story to strangers. This is a task I am performing for a dear father, and it will be more truly a labor of love to perform it myself and in my own way. If I knew a man who had interest and influence in a newspaper"—

Mr. Armstrong interrupted him with a smile. "You do know such a man. He stands before you."

"You, Armstrong! What newspaper?"

"The *Moon*. The little *Moon*. Price one half-penny, with all the latest intelligence, and unknown correspondents in every part of the world. But this is a secret between us; it must not be known that I am a proprietor."

"There is nothing that you are not, Armstrong. I have bought the little paper"

"Of dirty little boys and girls, who deal in *Moons* and matches. Both the same price. A box of Vesuvians and a *Moon* for a penny. There is a belief among some of our small ragged merchants that the Vesuvians are manufactured in the editor's rooms; hence the connection. When the *Moon* was first started, people thought it a strange name for a newspaper; I considered it appropriate, by inference. They dedicate morning and evening sheets to the Sun; they also sacrifice to the Stars. Why should not the *Moon* have its literary altar? We publish a dozen editions a day, and the *Moon* shines by day as well as by night. Now, in what way can the *Moon* serve you?"

"I propose to insert an advertisement in the paper, without its being known that I am the advertiser, offering a reward of five hundred pounds for information concerning Charles Davidge, once a clerk in the banking-house of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell."

"A shell," thought Mr. Armstrong, "straight into the enemy's camp." And said aloud, "I will manage it for you, Richard, but you must leave it to me to choose the proper time for its insertion. I promise that it shall appear before many days have passed. In the meanwhile, the fact that I am a proprietor of the paper must not be divulged. It is time we made our appearance in the house. Mrs. Chappell will remark our absence, and I dare say by this time Laura and her father have arrived."

They entered the house, and stood at the door of the reception-room, watching the company."

"As I told you," said the American, "the company is thinning, but there are many notable persons present. You see that old gentleman, with the star on his breast. That is Lord Beaumorris, an old gentleman whose society is eagerly courted. He was a great buck in his younger days, and the reputation attaching to him is that he is a man of honor, whose word is law upon doubtful points. To be 'cut' by him after being on speaking terms with him, is sufficient to hurt a man's standing in society. He is a pompous, conceited, high-spirited old lord, proud of his order and his dignity. Mrs. Chappell's *bele noire*. Mrs. Mercer, who occupies the house next to this, and whose husband made his money anyhow, would give her little finger if Lord Beaumorris would attend one of her assemblies; and this is one of Mrs. Chappell's triumphs and consolations. Observe that young exquisite, who looks as though he had just stepped from the modeler's hands. That's Mr. Frederick De Vere Saint Fitzfaddle, a great young man, very rich, with thirty thousand a year, and about twenty words of conversation. Such young men as he, with their weak faces and their hair parted in the middle, inspire me with profound admiration for my species. There is Mr. Wakefield, the Parliamentary agent, and there is Mrs. Huntly, talking scandal; see how the heads cluster around her. Mrs. Chappell's looking toward us; let us go to her."

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. CHAPPELL IMPOSES A PENANCE UPON THE AMERICAN.

MRS. CHAPPELL held up a chiding finger as the two gentlemen approached her.

"Throw your agis before me, Richard," whispered Mr. Armstrong; "mine is battered and full of holes."

"You need no shield," replied Richard, with a smile. "Your weapons are quite strong enough for self-defense, and you know how to use them."

"I have been consulting some of my friends," said Mrs. Chappell, "as to which of you two gentlemen I shall visit with my displeasure."

She appealed to Mr. Frederick De Vere Saint Fitzfaddle, who was standing by her side, for confirmation of her statement, and he, finding nothing to say in his limited vocabulary, elevated his fair eyebrows, and bowed vacantly.

"As you are strong," pleaded Mr. Armstrong, "be merciful; yet if you must strike, strike my friend. I am weak and old. But you have not explained, my dear madam, in what way we have been unfortunate enough to displease you."

"In what way? By absenting yourselves from my rooms, of which you are the most brilliant ornaments."

Mrs. Chappell, like a diplomatic lady, was careful that these words should reach only the ears of the gentlemen she addressed.

"I make you a present of that, Richard," said Mr. Armstrong. "My humble ambition is to be useful."

"Lady Barebones has been most anxious about you, Mr. Barton, and I have sent into every room to find you, without success. She herself peeped into the conservatory; you have made a conquest in that quarter. You need not look around; she and her daughters have left."

"For these and all other mercies"—murmured Mr. Armstrong.

"Hush, you naughty man!"

"But three, my dear Mrs. Chappell!" remonstrated Mr. Armstrong. "And such graces! The triple blessing is too great for any man of woman born."

"You are incorrigible," laughed Mrs. Chappell, always disposed to receive Mr. Armstrong's eccentricities graciously.

"We were listening in the garden to the ad-

mirable music of your Hungarian band. It is really you who are to blame for providing such attractions at your entertainments."

"Mr. Barton," said Mrs. Chappell, "did you ever know an American who was at a loss for an excuse for a compliment?"

"Mr. Armstrong, at least," replied Richard, "has always a reply ready."

"But," continued Mr. Armstrong, "after all, I am responsible for keeping Mr. Barton away from you. To tell truth, I am jealous of him. He is an attraction so powerful that it mortifies me to be thrown completely in the shade."

"Ah," said Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle, at length finding something to say. "Very good!"

"Our friend Armstrong," said Richard, "indulges in satire occasionally."

"I cannot say," observed Mrs. Chappell, playing with her fan, "that I am an admirer of satire. Define it, Mr. Armstrong."

"It is an overdose of bitters in the glass of sherry."

"Then as good sherry is spoiled by bitters, truth is injured by satire."

"I am on your side, my dear Mrs. Chappell," said Richard. "Truth requires no flavoring."

"It is awkwardly biting, sometimes," said Mr. Armstrong, "when administered neat."

"That depends upon the character of the patient," retorted Mrs. Chappell, turning to Lord Beaumorris and her husband, who came up together. "Lord Beaumorris, allow me to introduce you to our very intimate friend, Mr. Richard Burton, a friend of whom we are all very proud."

Lord Beaumorris, who spoke in jerks, pausing between every two or three words, and omitting a preposition and an adverb now and then, received the introduction with remarkable condescension.

"Delighted," he said, "delighted. Have heard—entrancing stories—Mr. Barton. Lady Barebones—enthusiastic. Millions of sheep—he?—millions! Wonderful. Creditable, too—very. Mr. Barton's reputation—in everybody's mouth. Charmed—to make acquaintance—young gentleman—so distinguished."

"Pompous old bore!" muttered Mr. Armstrong, under his breath, and as a relief, said to Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle, "Distinguished—don't you see?—for money. Heaps of it!"

"Don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle.

"So much," said Mr. Armstrong, gravely, "that he really does not know what to do with it. Then those millions of sheep, and a hundred thousand horses!"

"Gad!" cried Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle. "What a stable! Introduce me."

"With pleasure. Richard, allow me. Mr. Frederick De Vere Saint Fitzfaddle, one of our pillars of fashion."

"Ah!" simpered Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle. "Very good!"

"Mr. Richard Barton, a Croesus from the South Seas. The place he comes from is rather rough."

"One would not suppose so," interposed Mrs. Chappell, shaking her head in gentle reproof at Mr. Armstrong, "from Mr. Barton's manners. They have just that dash of open-hearted freedom which would give a rare charm to the manners of our too-ceremonious and somewhat affected English gentlemen." Richard bowed and smiled. "I really must protect you from the dreadful satire of your friend."

"I do not mind it," said Richard, with a pleasant look at the American. "It does not sting."

"That," persisted Mrs. Chappell, "is because you are so full of good nature."

"Then," said Lord Beaumorris, statelily, "what is country? What does it matter—born here or there! Good blood—to be sure—a great deal in it—great deal. But good name—everything. English gentlemen—ready to receive—with open arms—worthy representatives—and intelligence!"

"Set in a gold frame," murmured Mr. Armstrong.

"Of its young—and flourishing—colonies."

In proof of which Lord Beaumorris presented his hand for Richard to shake.

"I have great hopes, my lord," said Mr. Chappell, taking part in the conversation for the first time, "of inducing Mr. Barton to purchase an estate in the country, so that he may remain and become entirely one of us."

"Shall be happy—to hear, sir—you have done so."

"To a gentleman of Mr. Barton's wealth and ability," proceeded Mr. Chappell, "no position is unattainable. The Australian colonies have already supplied us with very able statesmen; in Mr. Barton's person, one might be added to the number."

"He would have to enter Parliament first," observed Mr. Armstrong.

"It would not be difficult," said Mr. Chappell; that is, not very difficult. Mr. Wakefield here would put him in the way."

Mr. Armstrong glanced at Mr. Wakefield, the Parliamentary agent, who had joined the party. When these men met, which was but seldom, they always crossed lances.

"Mr. Wakefield will put him in the way!" repeated Mr. Armstrong. "How?"

"Sir," said Mr. Wakefield, pulling out his snuff-box, an invariable habit with him when he was about to declare war or accept it, "these things are not to be spoken of too freely. They are understood without explanation."

"Like the shrugs and innuendos which sometimes accompany a speech, making what sounds fair objectionable."

"I don't quite understand you," said Mr. Wakefield, offering his snuff-box.

"I am very sorry, really," returned Mr. Armstrong, accepting the courtesy, and secretly admiring the Parliamentary agent's coolness.

"Don't apologize, I beg. There are other persons besides yourself who make a clear comprehension of their words desperately difficult by expressing their views in ambiguous language."

Impartial in his advocacy, Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle exclaimed, "Ah, very good!"

"You perceive, sir," said Mr. Armstrong, "that Mr. Saint Fitzfaddle's inclined to rival you in your want of comprehension."

"Let me compliment you," returned Mr. Wakefield, with perfect urbanity, "upon the skill you display in concealing your wit. One would be a long time discovering that you possessed sufficient of it to make a tolerably good repartee."

"Well answered. I admire the wit you display in endeavoring to convert a defeat into a victory."

"Well parried. Compliment for compliment, you know. I shall be happy to fence with you again."

"The pleasure, sir," said Mr. Armstrong, whom something in the Parliamentary agent's manner drove to the verge of madness, "will be entirely on your side."

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," returned Mr. Wakefield, with unruffled temper; "those laugh who win. Mr. Armstrong," he said, addressing himself to the others, "has good reason for being a purist in politics, for he hails from the country of political morality."

Mr. Armstrong did not wince at the blow, "From which you may be assured," he said to Richard, "that if you really wish to enter Parliament, it will be—for you—the easiest thing in the world."

"But why the easiest thing in the world for me?"

Mr. Armstrong rapped Richard's breast-pocket lightly. "You have a check-book, my dear friend."

Lord Beaumorris took up the ball, and said, with some asperity, "Yes sir—happily—it costs money. Happily, I say, democracy has not a large banking account."

"If it had, my lord," remarked Mr. Wakefield, "democracy would no longer be democratic."

Mrs. Chappell deeming it prudent to change the subject of conversation, questioned Mr.

Armstrong as to a fete which it was whispered he intended to give.

"It is more than whispered," she said; "it is actually talked about; many persons have asked me to tell them all the particulars, and would scarcely believe me," she added, with a fascinating smile, when I answered that I was not in the secret."

"You shall be my confidante," said Mr. Armstrong, "and my only one at present. Rumor, for once, is close to the truth. I do intend to give a kind of garden entertainment, and the arrangements are very nearly completed. In two or three days the cards will be out, and I hope to have the pleasure of your company."

"Indeed, I shall be delighted to be there. A garden entertainment! What a charming idea! Tell me more."

"My house and grounds will be open to my friends from three or four o'clock until any hour in the night that they may please to honor me with their company. There will be a variety of entertainments—croquet, music, singing, conjuring, flirtation, and a few surprises. In the evening the gardens will be lighted up with ten thousand colored lamps—(see advertisement). I propose to have dinner-tables spread in the gardens, and all I wish my friends to do is to make themselves at home and enjoy themselves without restraint. I am not sure whether the entertainment will be a success, it is so entirely new, and out of the conventional order of things, but I shall do my best to make it a pleasant affair."

"It must be a success, it is so charmingly original, and so like you, Mr. Armstrong. It will be the event of the season. May I mention it to my friends?"

"I shall be proud to have it known that you approve of my idea. Do not speak plainly of it, however. Surround it with a halo of mystery—it will make the affair all the more successful. I frankly confess, my dear Mrs. Chappell, that I am vain enough to wish that society shall be curious about it."

"Mr. Armstrong," said Mrs. Chappell, "are we on sufficient friendly—nay, I will say, intimate terms, to warrant me in putting a delicate question to you?"

"To be permitted," replied Mr. Armstrong, "to reply in the affirmative is the highest compliment you can pay me."

"Flattered!" she exclaimed, tapping him lightly with her fan. "I shall take the liberty then? Why do you not marry?"

The American paused before replying. "Even that wonder," he said gravely, "may take place one day; but I am not in a position to say more at present."

"Thank you for so much of your confidence. And now, as I am full of questions to-night, and as success makes even a woman bold, I am going to ask you a very particular favor. You have been very satirical within the last quarter of an hour to more than one of my friends, and I insist that you shall make reparation to me."

"Inflict any penance upon me you may think fit, my dear madam," he said, gayly.

"You promise to perform it?"

"Yes, if it is within reason. I think I may trust you."

"America is the land of spiritualism, and you are an American. One of my friends whispered in my ear that she was certain you are a spiritualist, and I am quite curious on the point."

"A lady has scarcely need to tell me that. Nevertheless, your friend is wrong. I am not a spiritualist. Curiously enough, Mr. Barton and I have had a conversation this evening upon mesmerism."

"I do not know the difference between them, and I have had my curiosity excited so strongly that I am dying to see something of it."

"Spiritualism or mesmerism?"

"Either. I do not care in what way it is shown, and I lay my commands upon you to give me some proof, at your delightful garden party, of one or the other."

"I cannot lend myself to trickery. As I told

Mr. Barton, I have some belief in animal magnetism."

"What's that?"

"A form of mesmerism."

"Then my friend was right, notwithstanding your denial. These things will peep out. Now, mind; I have your promise."

"Indeed, my dear madam," said Mr. Armstrong, much perplexed at Mrs. Chappell's pertinacity, "I do not see my way."

"And you an American! As though you could not do any thing you set your mind upon! I will not be denied, and I shall keep you to your promise."

Mr. Armstrong was glad, at this juncture, to see Laura and her father in the room; they had just arrived, and were looking around in search of Mr. Armstrong and Richard.

"What a pretty girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Chappell, putting up her eye-glass.

Mr. Armstrong seized the favorable opportunity.

"She and her father are particular friends of mine," he said; "I shall esteem it a favor if you will welcome them for my sake."

And advancing to meet Laura and Rigby, he presented them to Mrs. Chappell.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FANGLE TELLS THE LATEST NEWS.

MR. CHAPPELL took advantage of the conversation between his wife and Mr. Armstrong to draw Richard away. Lord Beaumorris chatted with Mr. Wakefield upon the deplorable spread of democracy, and Mr. Wakefield, who was in the Conservative interest, agreed with his lordship. He propounded a theory that the spread of democracy was due to the discovery of the gold fields. It has made money more plentiful, and the working man, reveling in high wages, set himself up against his employer.

"It is a bad state of things," said Mr. Wakefield, "when Jack considers himself as good as his master." Mr. Saint Fitzfiddle, being left to himself, took refuge before a mirror, wherein he contemplated without weariness the parting of his hair.

"This is scarcely a time to speak of business," said Mr. Chappell to Richard, "but I may as well remind you that the share list of the United Wheel closes at noon to-morrow. Have you decided how many shares you will take?"

"What do you advise?" asked Richard.

"My dear Mr. Barton," said Mr. Chappell, with a frank smile, I must not directly advise in a matter in which, as you are aware, I am so intimately interested. I could not conscientiously do so. Where my own interest is not at stake, I am always ready to counsel a friend. But you can see for yourself; the shares this afternoon are quoted at one premium. I have investigated the affairs of the company, and the prospects are really wonderful. The assays give from twelve to eighteen per cent. That is all I can say, and I would not say as much to any person but yourself. I shall invest largely in it. Now, you have a considerable sum of money lying idle, and the United Wheel guarantees six per cent. for ten years."

"Upon your recommendation, then," said Richard; but Mr. Chappell interrupted him.

"No, no; not in this instance. I am Chairman of Directors, and am in a delicate position. I can only say that if I had a hundred thousand pounds lying idle, I would with perfect confidence invest it in the United Wheel. From present appearances, the shares will be at a high premium in a month, and were it otherwise, the investment is a good one."

"I should not put any money into it as an investment; I should sell out in a week or two."

"You have a famous head for business; but I should hold on. However, I'll not advise."

"The shares are at a hundred pounds?"

"Yes, you might take a hundred or a hundred and fifty with safety. I will use my interest, and any number you apply for shall be allotted."

"Thank you; I will take a hundred."

"That's right. Come into another room, and I will fill in the application paper. I am glad that you act on your own judgment in this matter."

They went into one of the small retiring-rooms, and Mr. Chappell wrote the application.

"Sign your name here. That's right. You can let me have the check in the morning. I see you are anxious to join the ladies. I will excuse you."

When Richard entered the room with Mr. Chappell, he caught sight of Mrs. Fangle, and observing in her manner a desire to speak to him, he now went in search of her. A few steps from the door he came upon Mr. Fangle.

"Do you know where Mrs. Fangle is?"

"Do you know where Mr. Chappell is?"

These questions crossed one another. Mr. Fangle answered in the negative. Richard pointed to the room in which he had left the banker, and passed on.

"What can he want with my wife?" thought Mr. Fangle, looking after Richard.

He was so much in the habit of neglecting his wife, that for any one to want her was a matter of surprise to him. But in the light of a more important matter, Mrs. Fangle faded from his mind. He had just had a few words with Mr. Magnum, a member of the Stock Exchange, who, finding no other person to talk with,

talked with Mr. Fangle. Mr. Fangle was in his glory. Mr. Magnum had given him some information, which he was burning now to impart to Mr. Chappell, thinking it would be agreeable to him. Mr. Fangle was a worshiper of rich men, and liked to rub against rich men's coats. It was not as good as being rich himself, but it was almost next door to it. "Bankers and merchants," he said to himself, after his interview with Mr. Magnum, "are always eager to hear the latest news—especially about ships."

Mr. Chappell had at this period of his life arrived at a pass which compelled melancholy brooding whenever he was alone. He was continually engaged in some fresh venture, such as the United Wheel—desperate ventures many of them, as he too well knew. He could not escape from them; he snatched eagerly at every chance that presented itself, in the hope that one of them might turn up trumps, and that he might recover his losses. He shuddered as he contemplated the risks which had accumulated about him he scarcely knew how. Not one of them had as yet turned up trumps, and he saw the sword of ruin hanging over his head. Always, now, when he was alone, his skeleton made itself visible to him, and whispering warnings of discovery. He was a miserable, unhappy man. If he could have poured his troubles into a sympathizing ear, it would have been a rare comfort to him; but he dared not confide even in his wife, and his torture was the more intense because he was compelled to wear a false face to the world. He envied many a man in his service who envied him, and thought how happy he would be if he could change places with this one and that one. In this very company of the United Wheel, in which he had induced Richard to take shares, he had no real confidence. He stood to win a great stake in it, but, as a principal, he would be compelled to hold on to his shares, and he knew that the venture was not sound at the bottom. The strain was becoming almost too terrible for his strength.

Mr. Fangle had to cough two or three times before he could attract Mr. Chappell's attention. Mr. Fangle's cough was an index to the relations between the two men—it was a cough deferential, which expressed, "Excuse me for doing it; I really feel it a great liberty." The expression of care in Mr. Chappell's face vanished instantly when the sound aroused him; he looked warily up, and his countenance cleared entirely when he saw who it was that had entered the room.

"Ah, Mr. Fangle. I am glad to see you. Mrs. Fangle's with you, I hope."

"She is here, sir," replied Mr. Fangle; "thanks to Mrs. Chappell's kindness and condescension. It is a great privilege to come among the great and noble." Mr. Chappell waved his hand with condescension. "My only desire is to live long enough to show my gratitude for all your generosity. When gentlemen in such a lofty position as yours, Mr. Chappell, stretch out the hand of friendship to struggling genius."

Not knowing exactly how to complete the sentence, Mr. Fangle passed his hand across his eyes. It was unfortunate that it did not occur to him to borrow half a sovereign of Mr. Chappell, for this sort of homage was so agreeable to the banker, that he would have advanced the money without hesitation.

"It's a pleasure to us as well as to you," said Mr. Chappell. "Is your invention progressing?"

"It's getting along slowly, sir, but there is still something wanting."

"Capital, I should say. If your invention be practical, and likely to be valuable, I might induce some person to put a little money in it, subject, of course, to his approval of the idea."

Mr. Fangle did not jump at the offer; the proposition that he should part with any share in the invention seemed to make him nervous.

"I think we shall be able to manage as it is, sir; I have a partner who is very jealous. Nothing can move him. A little more time, a little more time." Then he changed the subject. "I came to find you, sir. I have been conversing with Mr. Magnum, of the Stock Exchange, and thought you would like to hear the latest news."

"You are very kind," said Mr. Chappell, with an easy air. "Concerning stocks?"

"Stocks! No—yes," cried Mr. Fangle, correcting himself. "Ships come off stocks."

Mr. Fangle considered this rather a good joke.

"Ships!" exclaimed Mr. Chappell. "What ships?"

"The *Golden Mariner*. Some few weeks ago, if you remember, there was a rumor concerning her, and now the rumor is revived—but it is not authenticated, Mr. Magnum said."

"To what effect is this rumor?" asked Mr. Chappell, with difficulty repressing his agitation.

"They say the ship has foundered." Mr. Fangle did not see Mr. Chappell's haggard face, or he might not have proceeded so glibly. "Terrible news, is it not? It is reported that not a soul is saved. Think of the widows and orphans!"

"Widows and orphans!" cried Mr. Chappell, unable now to restrain his passion. "Think of the money lost, and what its loss brings with it! The sacrifice of position, reputation!"

The startled look of amazement in Mr. Fangle's eyes warned him that he was betraying himself, and by a great effort he controlled his agitation, and spoke in a more subdued tone. "Forgive me; you must be aware in what kind of groove the thoughts of bankers are always running. For a moment I was thinking only of those who might be ruined by the catastrophe. But what is their loss compared to the suffering of those who are gone, and the women and children who are left behind? Only a rumor, you say. Let us hope it is not true. Poor creatures! Poor creatures!"

And he left the room, with his handkerchief before his eyes.

"Singular!" mused Mr. Fangle. "Very singular! I could have sworn he was in earnest. I'll go and see if I can pick up any more information. The

last edition of *The Moon* may contain some. I'll get it."

Richard was right in his conjecture that Mrs. Fangle wished to speak to him. She was deeply grateful for his kindness to her and her children, and she felt like a mother to him, notwithstanding that he was so rich, and she so humble. She had long ago discovered the secret of Richard's love for Laura, and knowing that Laura loved him, she settled it with herself that she ought to do something to hasten matters between them. So that when she and Richard came together on this night, she soon found a way to revert to the subject nearest to his heart. She spoke only of Laura. How beautiful she was, how good, how kind, what an admirable daughter, what an unselfish friend. Richard would have been content to listen for hours to the theme upon which Mrs. Fangle strung her tender utterances, and he drew Mrs. Fangle on to speak of Laura's childhood. Mrs. Fangle had much to say, and she performed her love task in a manner that would have made Laura blush had she heard.

"No woman ever had a truer friend than Laura has been to me. The children dote on her, and when they see her coming are wild with delight. Sometimes they say, 'Here comes Mamma Laura!' or 'Here comes Sunshine!'"

In this way did Mrs. Fangle debate upon Laura's virtues with perfect sincerity, believing every word she uttered. She spoke much of Laura's devotion to her father, and of her sympathy with him, Mrs. Fangle, as you know, was ignorant of the actual story of Rigby's life, but she had made one for herself out of a patchwork of guesses.

"They were always poor," said Mrs. Fangle; "but you don't mind that."

"Not I," replied Richard. "I esteem her the more because of that."

"What an angel of a man!" thought Mrs. Fangle, and continued aloud, "And for a good many years a great trouble has been hanging over her father. That is all over now. I shouldn't wonder" (this with a sly look at him) "if you knew something of the story."

"Yes," said Richard, with a little reserve, "I know something of it."

"Of course you do," rejoined Mrs. Fangle, with a knowing smile.

"But not of Laura's part in it. What induced her to go on the stage, Mrs. Fangle?"

"Love your soul! What else but to try and assist her father out of his difficulties? 'Mrs. Fangle,' she said to me, 'I want to earn some money'—dear, dear! money always is at the bottom of all these troubles—I want to earn some money, and I am going to be an actress.' I went to the theater with her every night, and used to encourage her, for she was dreadfully nervous, although she seldom showed it. But she was never in love with the stage, and when—through a friend who shall be nameless—her father got over his trouble, she left it."

Then the kind-hearted gossip went on to say how often she and Laura spoke of Richard.

"After she was dressed for the party this evening, she said to me, 'Mr. Barton will not know me when he sees me.' 'My dear,' I answered, 'Mr. Barton would know you anywhere, and in any dress.' And you would, wouldn't you? There, now! I think I have said enough—more than enough, perhaps. Laura would never forgive me if she knew."

"One moment, Mrs. Fangle. I am sure you have spoken with a kind purpose, and I thank you heartily. You have given me hope and courage. If you are not deceived."

"Deceived, my dear!" The familiar words slipped from her unawares, but she was not afraid they would be resented. "Shall I whisper something to you?" she asked, looking up at him with shrewd kindness.

He inclined his head, and she whispered a few words in his ear. When he raised his face it was radiant. The appearance of Mr. Armstrong put an end to the conversation, and Mrs. Fangle bustled away to find Laura.

"A good little woman that," observed Mr. Armstrong. "You are a great favorite of hers. You haven't seen Laura yet; she has been asking after you."

"There is another person I am surprised not to see—Frederick Chappell."

"He will come in later, I expect. I have no doubt, if he had known that Laura was invited, he would have put in an appearance before this."

"He will be surprised to see her. Was it not through you, Armstrong, she obtained the invitation?"

"Yes; I had more than one purpose to serve in obtaining it. It is in a certain sense a fine revenge for Frederick Chappell's behavior toward her. Then it is a great triumph for Laura's father. It would move you to pity to hear that old man's history. Laura is behaving bravely. In all this fine company of born ladies there is not one to compete with her. Mrs. Chappell has been most kind to her, and when Lord Beaumorris asked who that pretty girl was, and Mrs. Chappell presented her, I saw her father's face light up with joy. Lord Beaumorris talked to Laura for quite five minutes; you would have been amused to have heard what he said to me afterward about her. The old lord mumbled out that she was fresh and sweet, and hunting about for a simile, hit upon the original one of a flower, and called her a fresh-gathered rose. From that moment I forgave him for his grand airs and pomposity, and I shall now forever look upon him as a fine and gallant old gentleman."

The American was very animated, and his face, usually so grave was brighter than Richard had ever beheld it. With singular earnestness, he said to Richard, after a short pause:

"Richard, this night may mark a bright and happy era in my life."

"In mine, also," thought Richard, as he strolled through the rooms by the side of his friend. He had fully made up his mind to speak to Laura, and ask her

to be his wife, if he could find the opportunity. Mrs. Fangle's words were not to be mistaken. Laura loved him. His pulses were charged with joy and happiness. "Laura loves me; Laura loves me," he thought. How sweet and beautiful life was to him!

CHAPTER VIII.

LAURA'S DREAM.

Mrs. Fangle's conversation with Laura, after her interview with Richard, was short and to the purpose. Indeed, it can scarcely be called a conversation, for the good little woman had all the talk to herself. The arrangement of Mrs. Chappell's rooms afforded ample opportunities for private conversation, and there were many convenient nooks and corners in which those who were disposed for flirtation could carry out their wishes. Mrs. Fangle drew Laura into a retired nook, where they were free from observation. They stood now by the side of a window which opened out into the garden, and a pair of heavy curtains concealed them from the eyes of the guests. The recess was a large one, and that part of it which was farthest from the window was in the shade. At that end of the recess there was a private door, which led into private rooms in the house. Mrs. Fangle and Laura, standing by the window, could plainly see each other, for the night was clear and the moon was shining. Laura's face was bright with happiness. "Can it be true?" she asked herself. "Can it be true that he loves me?" She felt that she was unworthy of him; how could she make herself worthy of one so good and noble? She had thought of him, dreamed of him, from the first hour she saw him; his presence had always brought delight to her. Her father had not told her the name of the friend who, suddenly and unexpectedly, had so nobly assisted him and reinstated him in society. "I will tell you soon, my darling," he had said: "at present my lips are sealed." She did not need him to tell her; her heart told her very surely who was their benefactor. Still, the mystery which surrounded the affair had at first engendered doubts, but these were soon dispelled by Mrs. Fangle. "A man in love will do anything, my dear," Mrs. Fangle said, and in a hundred ways the little woman encouraged Laura in the belief to which she was only too willing to yield. And now, when Mrs. Fangle spoke out plainly, and told Laura all that had passed between her and Richard, the young girl felt that her happiness was almost too great to believe in.

"I can hardly believe it," she murmured. "Are you sure, Mrs. Fangle?"

"Pop sure, my dear, unless there are two Lauras and two Richards. I know the signs well enough, although it is a long time since Fangle and I courted. What a wonderful man I used to think him!—Fangle, I mean, my dear. Ah! courting is the happiest time!"

"You must not say that, Mrs. Fangle."

"Well, no, my dear; but it is for some of us. Not for you, Laura, for every thing is bright before you; but if you were to ask for my advice whether you should marry a poor man, I should say, No." (Laura thought: "If he had not a penny in the world, and asked me to be his wife, I would gladly say, Yes.") "Fangle and I might have been happy if he had only a little money; we can't live all our lives upon air, my dear. But, there! why should I make you unhappy with my troubles! And your case is so different. It is a romance, my dear. Only think of his coming over the ocean such thousands and thousands of miles, and you two falling in love with each other! It is like a play."

"Hush! Mrs. Fangle," said Laura, placing her fingers on Mrs. Fangle's lips. "Some one is coming."

Mrs. Fangle peeped out of the curtains.

"It is only your father, my dear. I shall tell him you are here, and then I'll go and look for Fangle. Ah, what a different man he was before he was married! Quite handsome, my dear. But men do alter so after marriage, in more ways than one. Laura is here, Mr. Rigby." And Mrs. Fangle slipped away as the old man stepped into the recess. She did not go in search of her husband. She kept watch outside the curtains, so that those within the recess should not be disturbed; she kept watch, also, for Richard, to give him the opportunity she knew he was seeking for, of speaking to Laura when she was alone.

Rigby gazed with love and admiration upon his daughter, who, as she stood by the window, bathed in soft light, might have inspired a painter with a theme. "I have been looking for you, my dear," he said.

"Mrs. Fangle and I have been talking here for quite ten minutes, I should say, papa. Is it not peaceful and beautiful here?" She drew him to her side, and he passed his arm around her. "What do you think of me, papa, dressed as a grand lady?"

"You are a good girl, my darling—that's better."

"Everybody wants to spoil me with flattery—even you, papa. I never thought I should live to be flattered by a lord; you have no idea what compliments Lord Beaumorris has paid me to-night. But I am determined not to be spoiled, so I shall only believe just half what is said to me."

"You may believe every word I speak, my darling. Laura, you have been a great blessing to me."

"I am glad you love me, papa."

The deep tenderness in her voice caused him to look at her more closely.

"Why, Laura, there are tears in your eyes!"

"They are tears of happiness, dear papa—for I am, oh, so happy! No, I cannot tell you why, except that everything seems fairer than it used to be. I am not crying now. And so you are proud of me, papa!"

"Proud of you, my darling!" he said, softly, kissing her.

"How different everything is with us now, papa! How different, and how much brighter. Think of our being invited here, and your being received upon an equality among all this gay company! And but a little while ago—"

She paused, and in the sentence that followed mused upon the happy future which she saw before her. The current of lovers' musing is forever the same. As Richard had derived the most exquisite pleasure from the thought that Laura loved him, so she found the sweetest happiness and purest delight she had ever experienced in the whisperings of her heart that she was loved by her hero. Her father's voice broke upon her dream, but did not disturb it.

"Do you know, my dear child, to whom we owe all this?"

"Ah," she thought, "do I not know?" but her words did not betray her. "You promised to tell me, papa."

"I have come to tell you, dear child. My lips are unsealed now, and I am authorized to speak. I can tell you to whom I owe it that I am able to raise my head, after all these years and look honest men in the face once more. It has come to me very late in life, my darling, but I thank God that I have lived until this time. Laura, my child, it is but seldom that we have spoken on the theme that has weighed me down during all these years, but it is necessary that I should speak of it now. Even you, my child, who have been my only companion and solace, can scarcely know the daily agony I have suffered; even you can scarcely compass the depth of my gratitude to the noble friend who enabled me to pay the debt of shame and disgrace which blackened my name and stained my honor."

"Do not think of it, dear papa!" she entreated, seeing how strongly he was moved.

"Not think of it, child!" he exclaimed, unable to stem the current of these bitter memories. "Before you were born, it poisoned my life. My hair has grown white in the one long thought of it which has filled my mind for more than a generation, to the exclusion of every other subject of human interest."

She checked him gently here. "Dear papa, you thought of me."

"Forgive me, child; you have been my light. But for you I should not have been able to live through it. Although so many years have passed, all is as fresh to me as though it had occurred but yesterday. I see him now, my brother, standing in the dock, calm and cold, not oppressed by a sense of his guilt—Hush, child! he was guilty. Not a person in the court who did not pronounce him so. Everybody whispered it round about me, and commented upon the brazen effrontery, as they termed it, with which he bore himself. His own lawyer broke down in the defense. Defense! there was no defense. His bare word that he was innocent—of what avail was that?"

"If he were innocent, papa," pleaded Laura, pityingly, "that were enough."

"Dear child, while my head was bowed down by shame, and darkness encompassed me, I tried hard to believe him. I fought with my reason, with my sense of right and wrong, and said, 'He cannot be guilty; his word is sufficient.' But the missing key was found in his office coat—the missing book at his lodgings; and when these proofs were brought forward, and I heard the damning testimony of a fellow-clerk, the comments of the people, the reluctant admission of his own counsel that he did not see how he could resist the evidence, and that all he could do was to plead the extenuating circumstances of youth and indiscretion—when I heard the summing up of the judge, and the rapid decision of the jury, 'Guilty'—hope died utterly away, and I could no longer doubt the guilt of the brother I had loved so dearly."

"Even then he declared his innocence?"

"To the last. Before sentence was passed, he said proudly, in reply to an observation made by the judge with reference to the plea of his counsel for mercy, 'I do not ask for mercy, my lord, for that would carry with it an admission of guilt. I am as one in a web, and I am powerless. But I am innocent, as I hope for future mercy. The judge rebuked him for his obstinacy, and sentenced him to transportation for life. I bade him good-bye as though he were on his death-bed.'"

"Oh, father, it was hard!"

"It was just. His last words to me were, 'Brother, the day may come when you will repent your injustice;' and I told him that the object of my life should be the restitution of the money he had embezzled. He made a gesture of despair, and we parted forever. Until that day I did not realize how terrible was the blow that had fallen upon me; but the knowledge came swiftly. The moment I stepped out from the prison-door, after that last interview with my brother, the world was changed to me. Every friend and acquaintance fell away from me, and would know me no more. Not one merciful word, not one kind look was given to me; not a hand clasped mine in friendship; I was tainted and disgraced; my brother's infamy had made me infamous. You know the rest; you know how vainly I strove to save; and though you tried to help me, poor child, I might have died with the debt of shame still clinging to me had it not been for the noble-hearted man who, for your sake, supplied me with the means to repay the money my brother had stolen."

Both her sympathy with her father and her joy at the confirmation of her dearest hope kept Laura silent; but the unspoken words were in her mind, "For my sake! Be still, my heart. For my sake!" Over the despairing story, what bright clouds were stealing to blot it out forever!

"Never again, dear child," continued her father, in a quieter tone, "shall this story, with my own consent, pass my lips. I should not have told it now but that it seemed to me necessary to show the generous kindness and nobility of our best friend in its true light. No words of mine can express my gratitude. Last week, for the first time since I left the bank, I passed the bank-door as the clerks came out, and then I knew that the story of the restitution was known, and that my shame was wiped away. They raised their hats to me—to me, the poor hall-porter! The youngsters who used to avoid me clustered around me, and held out

their hands to me. With the pressure of their young fingers upon mine, with the music of their kind voices singing in my heart, I—I could not help it—I cried for joy!"

There were tears in his eyes now. Brighter grew the clouds in Laura's dream.

"All this has our noble friend done for me, for your sake, dear child. Through him we are here, honored and respected. He has restored to me my youth, for your dear sake. I'm his debtor now, and you can repay him."

"How?" asked Laura, shyly, and in a voice so low that, had her head not rested on his breast, he could not have heard it.

"That is his secret, which he wishes to tell you himself. But can you not guess how you can repay him?"

"I think I can," she whispered.

"And you will, dear child?"

"Yes," she sighed, happily.

"Lord bless you! What joy it brings to me to know that your heart is in your words. I have not suffered in vain." The curtains were gently drawn apart, and another person entered the recess. "See, he is here—our friend and benefactor—the restorer of my honor."

He kissed her with great tenderness, and releasing himself from her embrace, left the place. Laura stood in blissful silence for a few moments, with night's soft light shining on her face. Then turning her head, she saw standing by her side—Mr. Armstrong.

CHAPTER IX.

A DECLARATION OF LOVE.

It is not often that the dream of a life is shattered in an instant of time. Generally, the conviction that we have been living in a shadow-land made bright by hopes which are never to be realized, comes only by gradual stages, and in such a manner as to lessen the bitterness of the shock. We fight against our reason; we question and doubt; we find and invent excuses; we are so tenacious of our treasure, so unwilling to be robbed and disenchanted, that we obstinately close our eyes to the fact. The woman we love is false. Who dares to say so? We look with anger on the person who first whispers the treason in our ears, and were it in our power to inflict a mortal injury upon him, we would do it without compunction, and find justification for the act in his baseness. He was our friend; he is no longer so. We used to confide in him; he is no longer worthy of our confidence. Why, it was to this very man that we first confessed our love for the best and purest being the world contained; it was to him we poured out our grief when, ungrateful that we were, we fancied she was cold to us—to him we poured out our joy when she spoke the dear and precious words which made the days fairer and the flowers more beautiful, and which kindled in our heart a star of love, and faith and truth, the light of which could never, never be dimmed. And now this false friend has played the traitor, and has muttered black treason to us. Out upon him! Never again shall our hands be clasped in friendship; the mask has dropped from his treacherous face. He goes from our presence with a sad countenance, and when next we meet we are strangers—as we should always have been but for our folly and trustfulness. Yet his words have left his sting and we feel the smart. They recur to us during the sleepless night that follows his disclosure, and our brain is alive with uneasy doubts. But ever and anon through the restless hours they pale in the light of the star of love that shines in our heart. Her face, with a smile upon it, rises to his imagination, and gives him the lie. "Can you mistrust me?" it expresses. "Look in my eyes for truth." We look and find it. But the doubts arise again. We throw the blame of our suffering upon the false friend, and it intensifies the wrong he has done us. When we see her again, her face seems to reproach us; but she smiles as she did yesterday, and her embrace is not less warm; her hand lies in ours, her lips are soft and willing.

The doubts have fled; we have lost a friend, but love and faith and truth remain. The star shines brightly. Yet within a week we are conscious of a change in her; what change and how it came we know not, but it is there. (It is not only with the leaves of a flower that "He loves me—loves me not," is played; and men and women are seldom so single-hearted as Margaret as to play it but once in life.) The doubts revive, and the sting which we thought her constancy had plucked out, smart again. And we hear other whispers. We fight and struggle against them; the fault is in our selves, not in her. Yet we cannot avoid seeing that her manner is not the same. She is more beautiful than ever, but her lips smile less frequently. The grateful and kindly feelings toward our kind which our love brought prominently into play, are weakening; a beggar who stands at the corner of the street in which she dwells suffers from this. We used to give alms to the beggar; to-day we pass him by without a thought. We study the history of our acquaintanceship and our love; we dwell on the memory of words, and looks, and kisses which we have treasured in our heart of hearts. Undoubtedly she is colder than she was; her enthusiasm in our ambitions is fainter; our conversation does not flow as in the old days—already and unconsciously we adopt the phrase, "The old days." And so, and so, gradually and surely, we learn the truth. The woman we loved is false, as all women are; truth and constancy are things of air, delusions, mockeries—to be found only in the dictionaries. Fool that we were, to believe in them! Life is tasteless. "Faitly, thy name is woman." The star of love shines no longer in our heart. The days are not as fair, the flowers are not as beautiful as they were. The world is changing for the worse. Our dream is shattered.

And as with love, so with friendship, so with faith in human nature, so with other hopes and fond anticipa-

tions that animate the shadow-land we conjure up around us.

But to Laura was not given a slow and merciful awakening from her dream. The presence of Mr. Armstrong in the place of the man she loved, and whom she expected to see, awoke her suddenly and mercilessly. She comprehended it all in an instant, and in that instant she understood that the brightest chapter in her life was closed; never to be continued to the happy ending which her fond musing had written for her in her heart. The shock was very terrible, and it was well for her that she was so placed that she could turn her white and terror-stricken face from Mr. Armstrong, and hide from his sight the anguish depicted there. It faded soon, and left her sad, and in a measure resigned. The image of her father rose before her—her father whose life had been one long despair—rose and strengthened her for what was to come. Could she plunge him back into the abyss from which he had been raised? It was through her, and for love of her, that his honor had been restored and his life brightened. By whom? By a man whom she had long esteemed and admired, and whom she knew to be good and just and noble. And this man came now to ask for his reward, and she had promised to give it to him. At this crisis in her life there came to Laura a courage of which no one who knew her would have believed her capable, but it is only on such occasions that the exercise of great qualities is called for. On one side stood Love; on the other Duty. It was for her to choose between them.

Mr. Armstrong, when he entered the recess, was not the bold, outspoken man we have hitherto seen. He had come to play his great stake, and his manner now displayed much tenderness and some timidity. His love for Laura had not been a sudden passion; it had grown out of his acquaintanceship with her, and it was based upon a sure foundation. When it suggested itself to him that he was growing to love her, it suggested itself also to him that he should either struggle against the feeling, or see Laura no more. Then he asked of himself, for what reason? Why should he shut the gates of happiness upon himself? Leading a busy life, and surrounded by acquaintances, he was still a lonely man; and of a night when he entered his rooms, their silence palled upon him. "If Laura was sitting in that chair!" he often thought, when he was alone. "If I could hear Laura's voice about the place!" His thoughts did not end there; he carried it farther on into the years, and drew pictures which made his heart beat with new thrills of happiness. These sensations coming to him when the heyday of his youth was past, were all the more powerful because of that.

He was emphatically an earnest man; in everything he undertook this great quality displayed itself; all his beliefs and opinions, all his impressions of men and manners, were founded upon a firm rock of earnestness, and this, in conjunction with a strong love for justice, in small things as well as great, formed the nucleus of a character which the few admired, and the many either disliked or did not understand. It was a notable feature in connection with his growing love for Laura that he found interest in a certain kind of literature which he had hitherto disregarded. If he chanced to meet with a story in which children and good women were depicted with tenderness and effect, he read it more than once, and invariably in some way associated Laura with it. Of this vein of newly developed sentiment he made no parade; he enjoyed it in secret, and wondered why he had not discovered it before. So he allowed things to take their regular course, not opposing them, and giving himself up to the pleasant beguilement. He could not fail to see that Laura derived pleasure from his society, and his hope grew with his love. He was curious to discover the reason of Laura's going on the stage, for he perceived in her none of that ambition which actresses display in one way or another. By this time he had established himself as her father's friend as well as hers, and so considerate was he toward the old man that he won his confidence. He questioned Mr. Chappell concerning Rigby, and learned that the old man had been in the bank since he was a lad, but from the banker he learned nothing more. At length, however, he heard the story from Rigby himself, and then he saw a way to perform an act in perfect consistency with his character. All this occurred before Richard Barton's appearance upon the scene.

And now Mr. Armstrong stood before Laura, prepared to play his great stake. Having spoken to the father, and obtained his delighted and grateful consent, he came to the daughter to make his confession. That she should turn her face from him when she saw him was to him a natural and modest action, for he knew that her father had prepared her for the interview. That she should be silent was also natural. It was for him to speak.

For a few moments, however, no word was spoken. Frequently, when we are most deeply in earnest, the words do not flow too readily. But during the brief silence strength came to both.

"Your father has spoken to you, Laura," said Mr. Armstrong, somewhat diffidently.

"Yes," she replied.

"Has he told you everything?"

"He has told me much—oh, so much of your goodness to him, to me."

"Let that pass, Laura. I have been actuated by selfishness in much that I have done."

"No, dear friend," said Laura, her voice growing firmer; her duty was becoming clearer to her every moment. "Let us speak plainly. Nay, hear me first. During the time we have known each other you have treated me with such unwavering kindness that I should have been ungrateful, indeed, if I had not learned to—esteem you, and to be proud of your friendship."

"The merit was in you, not in me, Laura."

"When we were first introduced, I was a poor actress, commencing my profession, and your kind words en-

couraged me. Your counsel was like wine to me. You gave me strength to battle with the difficulties—and they are great ones—that surround a young actress. But for you, I might not have had the courage to continue the work, and I was grateful indeed that I had won so true a friend. But during those days I sometimes ask myself, 'Why does he do all this? What motive can induce him to act so generously to one so humble as I?'"

"I do not deserve your eulogy, Laura; but your questioning was just."

"Then you became acquainted with my father, and came to our poor dwelling. I was happy and satisfied—more than satisfied, when I saw how your kindness affected my father, and what comfort you brought to him. He was never so happy as when you were with us. So time went on until a wonderful thing occurred. My father was enabled to pay a debt"—Laura's voice faltered here—"a debt of shame, and to hold up his head once more. A change came over our life—suddenly and unexpectedly to me—and I left the stage, there being no longer any occasion for me to remain upon it. But these were not the only happy events that occurred. Here, in this very house, to whose master my father was for years a servant, we find ourselves invited guests, honored and respected."

"As you deserve."

"It is but a few minutes since," continued Laura, with deep emotion, "that I learned to whom we owe all this—to you, most noble of friends! It is you who have renewed my father's youth, and who have given to me the happiness of seeing him I love as I love to see him."

"Then you are happy, Laura?"

She did not hesitate in her answer. "Happy in the change that has come upon us? Yes."

"It makes me glad to hear you say so. Laura, has your father told you nothing else?"

"No," she faltered, "except—except—"

"Except," he repeated, with tender encouragement.

Her head drooped—"That you had a secret."

"You shall hear it. I have come to tell it to you, hoping that you guess it, and not now for the first time. You said that during the first days of our acquaintanceship you sometimes questioned yourself as to my motive for my conduct. Laura, I had but one. It was not long before the interest I took in you deepened into esteem—it was not long before esteem ripened into love. I confess it is for you, and for your sake, that I have helped your father. Selfish as it may sound, and selfish as it is, it is to this moment I have looked for—may I say my reward? No, reward is a wrong term. I ask for no sacrifice—although," he said thoughtfully, in his determination to be just, "it is a sacrifice for you to accept a man so much older than yourself. Laura, I love you! You know me, and know what those words mean when I speak them, as I do, in full sincerity and earnestness. They are from my heart. Believing that I can make you happy as you can make me, I ask you to be my wife."

She knew, indeed, what the words meant from him. She knew that she could trust him, that he would be faithful, true, and kind to her. "Duty, gratitude, honor, my father's peace of mind, all call me to him—and yet, oh, my heart?" The words were not spoken she thought them only; she could not muster sufficient self-control to speak aloud.

"It has been in my mind for a long time," he continued, tenderly, "to make the confession to you—to ask you to bestow upon me the greatest happiness which can ever be mine. Believe me, I would not ask you, if I were not confident of the future—but that shall speak for itself. I have lived a lonely life, Laura, and have seen my youth slip past me without love, without thought of love. But when I saw you, a new light dawned upon me, and I thanked God for it. I saw my life spreading out before me, fairer and more beautiful than I could ever have hoped it would be, with one by my side whom I could love and cherish. Still, if I had not some flattering expectation, I should have been silent. I have a lover's feeling, although I am not a young man, and when upon your last birthday—but a few days since—I sent you some flowers, and saw on the next day and the next that you seemed to find a pleasure in wearing them, I—forgive me for so doing—took it as a sign, and it made me happy."

With pain she learned that it was he, not Richard, who had sent her the flowers she had prized so highly. They were lying in her desk now. She had said to herself that she would never part with them. What bright garlands for the future had she not woven out of the faded leaves? She had spoken to them, and kissed them, blushing as she did so.

"May I say more, Laura?"

In a low tone she answered his question by another. "Have you considered the difference in our positions?"

"I know," he replied, simply, "that you are far above me."

"You know the story of our dishonor," said she, in the same low tone.

"Your father has made me fully acquainted with the story of his life. I know that his brother was guilty of a crime, and that that crime blighted your father's career. Your dishonor! It is mockery to call it so. Does justice demand more than its due? Because my father committed a crime for which I was not accountable, shall men shrink from me and avoid me as though my presence were contamination?"

"It is the world's fashion," said Laura, sadly, with her father's sufferings in her mind.

"It is cruel, it is unjust," exclaimed Mr. Armstrong, warmly. "If I live a pure life I am entitled to the respect of men. Not in this way shall the sins of the father be visited upon the children. 'See, Laura, how your only objection has melted away. Never was my life so bright as now. You will be my wife?'"

Not reluctantly, but as it seemed to him softly and modestly, as he would have had it, the answer came:

"Yes."

On her part the sacrifice to duty was made; on his part, the most precious prize the world contained was won. He inclined toward her with eager tenderness, and pressed his lips upon her hand. As he did so, he heard a slight cough behind him. It came from Mr. Fangle, whose head was between the curtains, and who saw the simple caress. Mr. Armstrong went at once to him, and closed the curtains upon Laura, who, overcome by emotion, sank into a seat by the window. He felt that at such a moment she would wish to be alone.

"Beg pardon," said Mr. Fangle, with another cough, "but I thought you might be there, and I popped my head in. Hope you don't think I intended to intrude."

"Not at all," replied Mr. Armstrong, with a bright smile.

"Shouldn't have done it, if I had known; but I saw nothing, I assure you. Mum's the word!"

"If you did see anything, I am sure you will not mention it."

Mr. Armstrong had no desire that what had taken place should for the present be known. He had settled his plans, and had decided how and in what way he would make the engagement public. The garden entertainment of which Mr. Chappell had spoken would, he considered, afford him a fitting opportunity of presenting Laura as his future wife, and he resolved to await until then.

"Mention it!" repeated Mr. Fangle, with fervor; it was a fine thing to be taken into Mr. Armstrong's confidence. "Not for worlds! Not for worlds!"

A few yards from them stood Richard and Mrs. Fangle in earnest conversation. Richard's face was radiant, and Mrs. Fangle was furtively watching her husband and Mr. Armstrong. She was anxious that they should move away from the curtains, so that Richard might speak to Laura without attracting observation. Something in Richard's manner appeared to nettle Mr. Fangle, and he said, fretfully:

"Mr. Armstrong, oblige me, and look at that young gentleman."

"Who? Mr. Barton?"

"Yes, sir. Have you observed how he has been courted—idolized—how everybody here bows down to him?"

"He is a great favorite," said Mr. Armstrong, with an amused observance of Mrs. Fangle.

"I know it—I see it. Tell me, then, where justice is to be found."

"Not commonly in a ball-room, I should say. But I do not quite understand you."

"Compare us. There—Money. Here—Brains. Money is smiling, well-dressed, courted, idolized, while Brains is reduced to its dress-coat. It is a fact, sir; I am reduced to it. I haven't another in the world. Being the least worn, it has outlived the others."

"I regret to hear it; but surely, when your invention is completed—"

"Ah, then, of course—but 'that little screw still bothers me! I almost forgot. Mr. Ghappell asked if I knew where you were; that's why I popped my head between the curtains. I think he wishes to speak to you concerning a rumor about a ship called the *Golden Mariner*."

"If there is any information about the ship, it should be in the last edition of to-night's *Moon*."

"I have sent for the paper; it will be here presently."

"I will go to Mr. Chappell."

"You will excuse me for that little affair," said Mr. Fangle, nodding his head toward the curtain as Mr. Armstrong was walking away. "You may rely on my discretion. I saw nothing, believe me. Mum's the word."

CHAPTER X.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

THE revulsions of feeling through which Laura had passed during the last hour were so strange and startling that she was grateful to be alone with her thoughts. They were sad enough, and her heart was aching very sorely, but she did not doubt that she had acted rightly. This was the first great sacrifice she had ever been called upon to make, and she had made it freely and willingly, from a strong sense of duty. Bitter as it was, it did not completely crush her. Her dream was over, and love had gone out of her life; but she would be strong, and live through her days bravely, and no one but herself should know the truth. She would do her duty by the noble gentleman to whom she was now irrevocably pledged, as she had done her duty by her father, whom he had raised from shame. The thought of that generous act, and of her father's joy at the union, brought some comfort to her. Her great fear was that she should not be strong enough, and that her weakness would betray her. She determined to school and keep watch over herself, for her father's sake and for the sake of the man to whom she had given her hand. Her honor demanded that she should do so. She would cast aside all thought of self and passion. Her part in the sad drama with courage and resolution. Yet with all these high resolves, it was to be forgiven her that she should allow her thoughts to dwell for a brief space upon the drama in which she had indulged. Questioning herself, she was at first unable to decide whether she hoped that Mrs. Fangle was wrong in the idea that Richard loved her. It would be best so, she said, after some sad self-communing, and yet it pained her to think it might be so. Then she was angry and indignant with herself that she should feel pained to know this. Why should she wish him to be unhappy? Why should she not be grateful to learn that her heart had whispered false hopes to her—as false as,

supposing they were true, they were now impossible of realization. She was not aware that her eyes were filled with tears, and that, had any person seen her face, he would have seen her misery there. She was fighting a hard battle with herself, and was fighting it bravely; but a deep wound had been inflicted upon her, and she could not help feeling the anguish of it. She placed the two men side by side: they were equally good, equally noble and generous; but she loved the one, and did not love the other. She shuddered at this treason; and reproaching herself for her wretchedness, resolved to think of Richard no more. And at this moment, her name, uttered softly by the man she loved, almost stopped the beating of her heart. She made no movement, and again Richard spoke her name.

"Laura!"

The tenderness expressed in his voice brought such mingled joy and sorrow to her that for a moment her strength deserted her. Only for a moment; the next, a sudden flame came into her face, a sudden strength came into her soul.

"Laura, I have a word to say to you."

She turned her tear-stained face toward him, and said, almost fiercely:

"Do not speak it!" And then, imploringly, "Have mercy on me, and do not speak it!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Richard, bewildered by the anguish of her appeal.

"Yes—mercy," she replied, pressing her hand to her heart. "There is a lesson in life I am trying to learn."

"What lesson?" he asked, in a gentle tone.

Another actor appeared upon the scene, hearing and seeing all, unheeded and unseen by Laura and Richard. The door at the farthest end of the recess, which led to the private rooms in the house, was noiselessly opened, and Frederick Chappell entered through it. He was generally a late comer at his mother's parties, and generally made his appearance by this entrance, so that he might mix with the guests without causing it to be observed that he had just arrived. Hearing voices, and recognizing them, he paused and listened. It was quite dark where he stood, and he could not be seen.

"What lesson?"

"Duty?" replied Laura, bravely. "It makes life sweet. Before inclination, selfish passion, heart-yearnings often, stands Duty, the pale teacher, whose smile of approbation is a lasting recompense for present sufferings, hard though it may be to bear!"

Richard came close to Laura's side, and took her hand.

"Laura, may not love and duty go together?"

"I must not—I dare not listen. Sir—Mr. Barton—I entreat you!"

She tore her hand from his grasp, and glided swiftly into the recess.

Richard gazed in bewilderment upon the curtains as they closed behind her. He could not follow her; his own agitation was too great. His first thought was that she did not love him; he flung it from him as he would have flung from him a treacherous friend. His second was more consoling.

"She dare not listen to me!" he said, in his excitement giving utterance to his thoughts. "Is it because there is a stain upon her name? Is there not, also, a stain upon mine? She thinks I am not acquainted with the story; but if she knew—if she knew the tie that binds us? Was not my father a criminal by the law's justice? Ah, Laura, we are equal there, at all events. I will see her again, and confess what I should have confessed earlier—but not to-night, not to-night."

Then he resolved that in the morning he would go to her father's house, and tell her his secret. He was in no mood for empty conversation, and he would have left the party at once, but that, in accordance with his promise to Mr. Armstrong, he desired to do so in the American's company. Seeing Mr. Fangle, he seized the inventor's arm, and said, excitedly:

"Mr. Fangle, let us go and get some champagne."

"With pleasure, my dear sir, with pleasure," replied the delighted Fangle.

To oblige so rich a man, Mr. Fangle would have pledged him in salts and senna, or anything as disagreeable.

"Come along, come along," said Richard, hooking his arm in Mr. Fangle's, and hurrying him on.

"He seems in a generous humor," thought Mr. Fangle; "I'll venture to tap him."

"Your health, Mr. Fangle."

"Yours, sir, yours."

And Mr. Fangle, draining his glass, set it down, and pulled a long face, and sighed. Mr. Armstrong would have understood instantly what was in the wind.

"Another!" cried Richard, clapping Mr. Fangle on the shoulder. "At such a time as this, away with melancholy! Drown dull care!"

Mr. Fangle sighed again.

"What is your trouble?" asked Richard.

"Money, sir, money," said Mr. Fangle, plaintively.

"Ah, sir, happily for you, you are spared such cares."

"Come, come; can I do anything?"

"If I might take the liberty, sir—I came out without my purse. Would you mind lending me half a sovereign?"

"Of course I wouldn't mind. Glad to oblige," said Richard, slipping a sovereign into Mr. Fangle's ready hand.

"Model of a capitalist," thought Mr. Fangle, feeling the thickness of the coin with satisfaction. "Why did I not ask him for more?"

"And the invention, Mr. Fangle?"

"Getting along splendidly, sir. Only that little screw to set right."

"And when it is set right?"

"Then, sir—then I shall astonish the world!"

Frederick Chappell, in the meantime, was still in the recess. He was too much occupied by Richard's unguarded words, and by the appearance of Laura among his mother's guests, to quit it immediately.

He was surprised to see Laura there. Since she left the theater he had attempted in vain to discover where she lived, and his passion for her had somewhat cooled. But now that she was in his mother's house, his passion revived again, and he longed to obtain private speech with her. Her presence was a proof that he had not too deeply offended her, and that the road was open for cordial relations between them. He had no doubt now that, were Richard and Mr. Armstrong out of the way, she would listen to him. Toward these two men he entertained a deep hatred. Compelled by his father's warnings to keep on ostensibly good terms with them, he had hitherto had no opportunity of repaying their slighting behavior toward him. Now he saw a way to revenge himself at least upon Richard. He recalled the words he had overheard:

"Is there not a stain also upon my name? Was not my father a criminal by the law's judgment?"

These words were in themselves sufficient to disgrace and confound Richard, and to cause his dismissal from society; but how to carry them to their legitimate conclusion? "Was not my father a criminal by the law's judgment?" Frederick Chappell knew that Richard's father had died in the colonies, and he made a shrewd guess that, as Richard came from a penal settlement, his father was a convict. He had heard and read of cases of men being transported, and making large fortunes in the land to which they had been exiled. This, doubtless, was one of such cases. "I'll find a means this very night," thought Frederick, "to expose him. If I could manage, at the same time, to break the friendship between him and Mr. Armstrong!"

Straight upon this thought, the American gentleman himself drew the curtains aside, and looked earnestly within.

"Whom does he expect to see?" was Frederick's thought, and went direct to the truth. "Laura!" He sauntered indolently toward Mr. Armstrong.

"Were you looking for Miss Rigby?" he asked. "She was here a moment since, as I entered by the door at the farther end. It was fortunate for her that I entered when I did."

"Fortunate for her!" repeated Mr. Armstrong, with a suspicious glance at Frederick.

"Those were my words," drawled Frederick. "For it gave her the opportunity of making her escape. She was much agitated."

"By what? Have you dared?"

"Gently, Mr. Armstrong—gently, if you please. I have not had the opportunity of exchanging a word with Miss Rigby. You may convince yourself of the truth of this by asking her the simple question. I did not know until this moment that she was among the guests."

"He speaks the truth," said Mr. Armstrong under his breath.

"When I entered, Mr. Barton was with her, and was passing a gross insult upon her. You may well look surprised. I am quite aware that you have a poor opinion of my veracity—for which, although it is a matter of perfect indifference to me, I take the opportunity of making you my acknowledgments—but you may believe what I say in this instance. Mr. Barton seized her hand in the most insulting manner, and she was compelled to release herself by force. It was, as I said, fortunate that I came in at that moment, but as it was I was too late to interfere."

"Surely you jest!"

"I am not in the habit," said Frederick, coldly, and not without dignity, "of jesting in this fashion. There is Miss Rigby."

Loath as Mr. Armstrong was to believe anything against his friend, the marks of agitation on Laura's face were in his eyes a confirmation of Frederick's statement. He went hastily to her, and it really appeared to him as though she needed and was glad of his protection. Other guests were strolling in their direction—Mr. and Mrs. Chappell, Lord Beaumorris, Mr. Saint Fitzfiddle, and Richard, who eagerly advanced toward Laura. Mr. Armstrong, however, stepped before him, and with a cold look drew Laura away. Before Richard had time to ask for an explanation, his attention was diverted by Frederick Chappell, who said, almost in a whisper:

"Let me have a word with you. It will be as well that the others shall not hear."

"What is it you have to say to me?" asked Richard.

"What it is necessary you should listen to. You insulted Miss Rigby just now."

"You lie!" said Richard, restraining his passion with difficulty.

Frederick shrugged his shoulders; he was willing to wait for his revenge. "I have a certain right to speak, for you know that I love her—loved her before you came."

"You do not suppose," said Richard, in a tone of contempt, "that I am not cognizant of your behavior toward her. It is worthy of you."

"You cannot induce me to notice your insults. We are not equals."

"We are not, indeed."

"You are far beneath me," said Frederick, still perfectly cool "and beneath all here. Listen to me. I know your secret; I have you in my power, and can expose you—and will, unless you give me your word of honor—no, your word will do, without the honor—never to address Miss Rigby again."

"Were we alone," said Richard, scornfully, "I would not answer you with my tongue. I am ignorant of what you mean when you say you have me in your power; but pursue this subject by but another word, and I will disgrace you in the presence of your father's guests."

"That is your answer? Be warned," Richard, with a disdainful look, turned his back upon Frederick. "Then take the consequences."

CHAPTER XI.

SOCIETY PASSES JUDGMENT UPON RICHARD BARTON.

WITH the exception of Mr. Fangle, all the principal persons who play their parts in this story, and who were by this time agitated by so many conflicting emotions, were now assembled in one part of the reception-room. Mr. Fangle himself, with a paper in his hand, bustled toward them, and completed the list of *dramatis personae*. He had obtained a copy of the last edition of *The Moon*, and was glancing through it as he approached the group.

"You seem interested in that paper, Mr. Fangle," observed Mrs. Chappell, with condescension. It was but seldom she noticed so small a personage as Mr. Fangle. "What paper is it?"

"*The Moon*, madam, *The Moon*—most extraordinary little paper? Comes out every hour with a phiz-z. Ought to be called the *Little Splutterer*."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Saint Fitzfiddle, with his usual contribution to the conversation. "Very good!"

"Is there anything particular in it?"

Mr. Armstrong took the paper from Mr. Fangle, and running his eye over the columns, said:

"This appears to be the most important paragraph: 'At the last moment of going to press, we are informed, upon the best authority, that there is not the slightest foundation for the rumor concerning the foundering of the ship, the *Golden Mariner*.'"

He handed the paper to Mr. Chappell, who read the paragraph with a feeling of intense relief and satisfaction.

"Is there any reason, Mr. Armstrong," inquired Mrs. Chappell, "for special anxiety concerning this ship?"

"Some reason, my dear madam. It has been a long time out, and nothing has been heard of it. Its cargo is very valuable, and it is heavily insured."

"I have heard," said Mrs. Chappell, "that these small papers occasionally print the wildest things. To make them sell, I suppose."

"They certainly like to spice their dishes. They are the people's papers, you must bear in mind."

"I can't understand what the people want with such things. They ought to be abolished. Do you not agree with me, Lord Beaumorris?"

"They do no harm, madam," said the old lord; "they do—no harm. So long as society—keeps itself within bounds—everybody in his proper place—such papers as *The Moon* do no harm. The people—the people require—to be amused."

Frederick Chappell saw his opportunity.

"Everybody in his proper place, my lord. And if when a person gets into the wrong carriage?"

"Turn him out—turn him out. He has no business there. If I got into a third-class carriage—I should deserve to be—turned out."

"The journalists of such papers as *The Moon*," said Frederick, "are continually hunting after the sensational, and, as Mr. Armstrong says, they like to spice their dishes. I know of a dish, however, which requires no spice to make it palatable when it gets into the papers."

"Indeed, Frederick," said Mrs. Chappell, "what is the story?"

"You will admit that it is an interesting one," replied Frederick, who, by his pointed manner, had attracted the full attention of the circle. It is the story of a person—a young man—who came to London from a colony which was once a penal settlement. Having money—how gained is not known—he managed to intrude himself into fashionable society. By his plausible manners he made himself a favorite, and was much courted for a time, until—and here comes the point of the story—until it was suddenly discovered that he was the son of a convict!"

"The son of a convict?" exclaimed Mrs. Chappell.

"How shocking!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Saint Fitzfiddle. "Very bad!"

"He had concealed this fact," continued Frederick, "from his new friends, dreading the consequences, perhaps. Possibly he thought, because he had a well-filled purse, that, even if discovered, society would overlook his degraded position. At length exposure came, and then—but I am not privileged to disclose more at present. I am waiting with curiosity to learn the end of the story, which has just reached the stage at which I break off."

"You know this person, Frederick?" asked Mrs. Chappell.

"Oh, yes; and so do most of those present."

"In parliamentary fashion, then, we call, Name, name!"

"Wait. I am curious to hear your opinions. How will the story end?"

"There can be but one result of the exposure," said Mrs. Chappell. "Such a person must be at once expelled from the society of ladies and gentlemen. Eh, Mr. Chappell?"

"Undoubtedly," asserted the banker; "no lady or gentleman can associate with the son of a convict."

Laura placed her hand on her father's arm. The old man at these words looked nervously around, and then cast his eyes to the ground as in days gone by.

Mrs. Chappell spoke again. "What is your opinion, Mr. Armstrong?"

"I reserve it," replied the American; "there are two sides to every question. I like to hear both before passing judgment."

"There is but one side," said Lord Beaumorris, with an air of great dignity, "to such a question as this. Mr. Frederick Chappell—in my opinion—bound to disclose name—of this person."

"The story will soon become common enough, my lord."

"We have at least one gentleman among us," said Mrs. Chappell, with a flattering smile at Richard, who had listened in silence to the conversation, and who

was standing in such a position that his face was partially hidden from the company, "who will not imitate Mr. Armstrong's reserve. Mr. Barton is from the colonies. His opinion will be valuable."

At this direct appeal all eyes were directed toward Richard.

"I shall be surprised," said Frederick Chappell, with distinct and malicious emphasis, "if Mr. Barton's opinion upon this special case is not as curious as it is sure to be valuable."

No one broke the silence that followed until Richard spoke.

"What," he asked, in a sad tone, "if this young man's father was innocent?"

"Nonsense, sir—nonsense!" cried Lord Beaumorris. "Did you not hear—what Mr. Chappell has told us? This person's father—was a convict—a convict, sir—and a verdict of guilty must have been passed upon him. No man is innocent—no man—after he is found guilty!"

Richard raised his head proudly, and looking steadily at Lord Beaumorris, said:

"My father was, my lord!"

"Your father! stammered Lord Beaumorris.

"Yes, my lord, my father. The story you have heard—though told for an unworthy end—is my story. It is I who, coming to England under some such circumstances as those narrated—with the exception of the lie that my father was guilty—have been admitted into society. But I did not force myself into it; unasked, it wooed and welcomed me. No man is innocent after he is found guilty! Fitting axiom, my lord, for the law's infallibility, whose unequal justice is sometimes administered by a fallible judge. Condemned to exile for a crime he did not commit—it was embezzlement from Mr. Chappell's bank he was charged with—my father lived and died in a distant land, torn from the dear associations of his youth, dead to friends, to family—a victim to pitiless injustice! He lived there a blameless life, and when upon his death-bed he told me his pitiless story, I swore to right his dear memory—and I will!"

Notwithstanding the manly though sorrowful tone in which this confession was made, the guests, one by one, fell back from the speaker, and stood apart from him.

Laura turned, sobbing, to her father.

"Hush, child!" he murmured. "It is of my brother he is speaking."

"Armstrong," said Richard, addressing himself to the American, "when I promised to tell you my story before we parted to-night, I did not think you would hear it thus strangely." Mr. Armstrong made no movement toward him, and a sad smile came upon Richard's lips. "Lord Beaumorris!"

"Sir," said the old lord, haughtily, "we are strangers."

"You took my hand a moment ago, my lord. It is an honest hand. My father was innocent."

"Prove him so, sir, and I will take your hand again. Until then, do not presume to address me."

"Mrs. Chappell—sir!"

Mrs. Chappell, with a freezing look, said:

"You must be aware, sir, that your presence here is an intrusion."

"I will not trouble you much longer, madam," replied Richard, bravely restraining his emotion. "Mr. Rigby!"

"I share your humiliation," responded the old man. "Your father was my brother."

"I know it, sir; but I had resolved not to disclose myself until I had established his innocence. Even you, sir, his brother, wronged him in your thoughts. Laura, you know all now; we are cousins."

He partly held out his arms to her, and in her love and pity she would have gone to him, but that Mr. Armstrong's restraining hand recalled her to herself.

"Mr. Armstrong," said Richard, his courage now almost giving away, "you promised to help me. Are you like the rest of them?"

Still the American made no response. He was at war with himself. The manliness of Richard's conduct, and the manifest honesty of his words, no less than the position in which he was placed, appealed strongly to Mr. Armstrong's just and generous nature, and he could not help entertaining a feeling of deep admiration for the young man; but Frederick Chappell's statement regarding the insult which Richard had passed upon Laura held him back. In the midst of his doubts, Laura's soft voice stole upon his senses, and he started as he heard his own words used against himself.

"Because his father," said Laura, "committed a crime for which he was not accountable, shall men shrink from him and avoid him, as though his presence was contamination?"

"You plead for him, Laura!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong, with a keen and earnest observance of her. "You!"

"Ah, yes," she replied, taking his hand, "for my sake you will help him—for the love you bare to me!" She pointed to Richard, who, defiant and despairing, was standing alone. He could have borne all but the loss of his friend—the man he loved and honored above all others in the world. That he could desert him in this crisis, brought bitter pain and desolation to Richard's heart. "Shall the sin of the father," continued Laura, "in that way be visited upon the children? If he live a pure life, is he not entitled to the respect of men? If you love me, help him to prove his father's innocence—for my sake!"

She would have knelt to him but that he prevented her.

Richard looked slowly and scornfully around.

"You all fall from me! Will not one stand by me?"

The American flung away his doubts.

"Yes, I will!" he said, stepping to Richard's side.

A gasp of grateful joy escaped from Richard's breast. But that other eyes were upon him, he would have found it impossible to keep back his tears.

Laura bowed her head over Mr. Armstrong's hand and kissed it, sobbing:

"Bless you, Noble Heart!"

SCENE THE THIRD.

AT THE GARDEN-PARTY.

CHAPTER I.

LIVING IN CHAMBERS.

HAD Mr. Armstrong been uniformly polite, affable and suave, had he curbed the biting cynicism which he allowed to force itself into expression, he would have been one of the most popular men in society. But as it was, many were frightened of him, and many absolutely disliked him. These latter were all men, and they disliked him because he was a plain speaker. With the women he got on better; he was nearly always gentle with them. But although he was not a general favorite, everybody was curious concerning him and his doings. He was reputed to be enormously rich; he was known to be exceedingly eccentric; and these were sufficient to cause him to be talked about. Then he was a bachelor, and a great prize in the lottery in which every single young lady in society had a share. Had he been a hundred times more eccentric than he was, had he squinted, been deformed, been hideous instead of good-looking, black instead of white, it would not have mattered—he would still have been a prize in the lottery, and the ugly flame would have had plenty of pretty moths fluttering around it. What a magician is money, and what fools are we who pretend to despise it! As if those who are rich do not see through us! Carps as we may, money is the only thing in the world worth living for. If you do not believe me, ask Mr. Million, to whom everybody bows and scrapes. So, my son (I should say if I had one), I have but one piece of advice to give you—make money, and keep on the right side of the hedge. That is the only true philosophy. All the rest is fudge.

A fortnight elapsed between the evening on which Richard Barton was exposed by Frederick Chappell and virtually expelled from society, and that fixed for Mr. Armstrong's garden-party. The public announcement of this forthcoming entertainment created a great sensation. The most extraordinary rumors were circulated concerning it; it was to be brilliant, unique, a kind of fairy festival, the like of which had never yet been seen. It was certainly, in society, the most important event of the year, and everybody who was anybody sighed for an invitation. Persons of consequence who were not invited condescended to intrigue for a card, and Mrs. Chappell, who was known to be on confidentially intimate terms with Mr. Armstrong, was besieged by friends and acquaintances beseeching her to use her influence with him. The task was congenial to her, and when she asked she did not ask in vain; Mr. Armstrong readily complied with every request she made to him. The house and grounds in which the entertainment was to be given had only lately come into his possession, and rumor was busy as to his motive for setting up so large an establishment.

"He's going to marry," said one.

"Nonsense," said another, "he is not a marrying man. Knows a trick worth two of that. He has taken the house for show, and only for the purpose of cutting out everybody else. Just like an American."

"You know nothing about it," said a third; "he has bought the place on speculation. He'll sell it to Lord Slapdash before the end of the month, and will make a pretty penny out of it. That's more like an American."

These were men's opinions; the women leaned decidedly to the matrimonial view of the question, and a score or two of mothers, who, with their daughters, were invited, were hourly and daily thinking of the trifling attentions Mr. Armstrong had paid their girls at such-and-such or such-and-such a party. As they viewed these small items through very powerful magnifying-glasses, they one and all decided that Mr. Armstrong "meant something." Lady Barebones looked upon the matter as good as settled. After what had taken place, she quite gave up Richard Barton—she would have been monstrously indignant had any person ventured to hint that she ever entertained views in that direction—and the honor she had intended for him she now transferred to the American gentleman. She arranged everything comfortably as to the settlements, and resolved to have a good look through Mr. Armstrong's establishment, to see that nothing was wanting. Of course it was the eldest Miss Barebones—a maiden of thirty-five—Mr. Armstrong meant to propose to, and Lady Barebones schooled herself to resignation at the idea of losing her daughter. "But I will not desert her," thought Lady Barebones; "he will have a mother-in-law." She would have preferred a member of the English aristocracy, but the eldest Miss Barebones was "getting on," and one could not have all one wished for in this world; and Lady Barebones made up her mind that Mr. Armstrong should pay for the honor of entering such a family as hers.

Other ladies who were invited, and who had no matrimonial designs upon Mr. Armstrong, looked forward with eagerness to the pleasure of running over a bachelor's establishment. I believe that a bachelor cannot give a greater pleasure to such of his lady friends as have seen nothing of bachelor life than to invite them to his chambers—not to such an establishment as Mr. Armstrong's, but to one of much more modest pretensions, consisting, say, of three or four or five rooms. Three, I think, would be better than five, and should the invitation be given in London, I would fix the locality somewhere between the Langham Hotel and

Fleet Street. How often have the ladies talked over the life of their bachelor friends whom they like so much, and whose talk about this and that is such a delight to them! He knows everything about literary men, and actors and actresses, and is on terms of intimacy with many of these great persons. He tells them all the little tidbits, not stale and mouldy as a three-days' cake in a confectioner's shop, but fresh from the oven, with the gloss on the fruit. They retail these tidbits to their friends, who envy them their source of information. He belongs to clubs, and meets So-and-so and So-and-so there. His lady friends are not sure he is not just a little wicked or naughty, but they do not like him the worse for that. "Last night," he says, "I went to the Cut and Come Again to see the new comedy, and afterward I strolled into the Bohemians to smoke a cigar. Mr. Top and Mr. Mop, Mr. Bang and Mr. Slang were there. Crusty, the dramatic critic for the *General Snarler*, was there, and Bluster, the new author, who thinks himself superior to Sheridan, and who was awfully cut up in the *Snarler*, happened to come in as Crusty was holding forth. They had a rare set-to. Bluster is always a bully with his tongue, and very rude and 'uppish.' He can occasionally write a neat epigram, but he never can utter one. He has to sit down to it, and trim it off, and polish it up. He would not admit this. He tries to make people believe that he has but to strike his forehead, and the sparks rush out. Young Wildfire came in and old Stager. We had quite a roomful."

In this way he entertains them, nursing his knee, as is the habit of many clever men, and at length, in an off-hand and very pleasant way, he asks them to come up to his place and have a cup of tea with him. "You mustn't expect anything," he says, with an admiring look at Emma, whose face has flushed at the invitation (he thinks very often of Emma, and she of him, I doubt not). "You mustn't expect anything; only a cup of tea." When the girls, with their mother and brother, knock at his door, he opens it quite unconcernedly, although he has been in a fever of expectation the whole of the day. He could have dispensed with the mother and brother, notwithstanding that he is fond of the former—but there are times! As the girls stand before him, with their bright eyes and pretty faces, he feels as though he would like to take them all in his arms in a bunch and kiss them. Both he and they must play propriety, however. They stand, and look at the chairs and tables with curiosity. They are not like other chairs and tables; there is an air about them that takes them out of the common run of furniture. The knickknacks in the room, the pipes, the pictures, resemble no other knickknacks, no other pipes, no other pictures. As for the cupboards, and the corner where the screen stands, the mystery attached to these has something Bluebeardish in its nature. Heaven only knows what she supposes the cupboards to contain, what she suspects is behind the screen; but the mother is not quite sure, as she glances toward them, whether she was quite right in allowing her daughter to come to such a place. The girls have no such doubts; they are in a glow of delight and wonder, and he, gazing upon them, says to himself that his rooms have never presented so bright an appearance. To the girls the room is like a temple, filled with strange relics; they idealize the most familiar articles.

The bachelor gives them a hearty welcome in well-chosen words. "Go in there," he says, "and take off your things." "There," is another room, properly prepared for its visitors, you may be sure, and after a dubious pause for which the mother is responsible—(it behooves her to be careful, for there is no telling what may happen in so strange a place, where the staircases are so dark and the house so quiet)—the female kind go into the room, while the boy-brother stands with his hand in his pocket and plays the man. The bachelor hears the girls giggling. They have found on the drawers pins, hair-pins, and a puff and powder box, all new, which the bachelor has thoughtfully provided, in his impression that females cannot sustain existence for an hour without them. The mother is compelled to check the exuberance of her daughters' spirits. She questions herself as to whether the bachelor ought to know anything of puff-and-powder boxes. The window-curtains in the retiring-room are tied up and decorated with blue ribbon, and Emma gives their host credit for exquisite taste. The girls are a long time in the room. The mother comes out first, staid and serious, and again glances suspiciously at the screen; the girls follow her, ready for fun and frolic. "This is Liberty Hall," says the host, and fishes out from odd corners picture-books and curiosities which never come to an end, he has so many of them. He does this carelessly, as though it has just come into his mind that they would like something to look over and pull about before tea; but the truth is that all these things have been artfully arranged beforehand.

When tea is ready (while the servant is laying the cloth, they stand at the window, which looks out upon some gardens), he, half unconcernedly, half tenderly, asks Emma to preside and pour out the tea. If ever a proposal was made to a girl in a roundabout fashion, this is regarded as one by Emma's sisters and mother, who exchange significant glances which Emma does not see. She is happy, and shy, and a little bit nervous, and is altogether a very pretty picture as she sits at the head of the table. Such wonderful tea, such amazing jellies, such sweet bread-and-butter, such rich cake and fresh fruit, were never set on her table before, and never will be again, for these girls. There are more Aladdin's caves than one, and not all of them are stocked with precious stones. I know how the happy night ends, but I do not know yet how the story ends, for the party I have been betrayed into describing was given only a few evenings ago. Let us hope that it ends as most stories of this kind do—with Emma often pouring out the tea for the host, who gives up living in chambers, and settles down into a respectable member of society.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CHAPPELL EXONERATES HIM.

KEEN as was the interest evinced in Mr. Armstrong's party, Richard Barton's affair was not allowed to pass over in silence. It became, indeed, a fruitful theme of conversation, and formed almost a nine days' wonder. It was discussed in fashionable circles, and spoken of at every dinner-party and "At Home" in Belgravia, and not an hour passed without a new light being thrown upon it, or a new piece of information being contributed to the general stock. Many, among whom was Lord Beaumorris, regarded it from a very serious point of view. That such a person as Richard Barton should have forced himself into society, knowing how vile he was, was a *scandalum magnum*, an offense not to be lightly regarded. When Lord Beaumorris left Mrs. Chappell's house on the eventful evening, he left with a dreaded conviction that Mr. and Mrs. Chappell's conduct in placing him and the son of a convict on a familiar footing required explanation. He was very indignant, and his parting bow to Mrs. Chappell was a very stately one. After all the guests had taken their departure, something like a scene had occurred between Mr. Chappell and his wife and son.

"What do you mean, sir," cried Mr. Chappell, glancing hastily around to assure himself that they were alone, "by bringing disgrace upon this house—upon my name?"

Mr. Chappell's face was very white, and his manner agitated, as he spoke.

"You take me by surprise, sir," drawled Frederick, quite satisfied with the part he had played. "I am not aware that I have brought disgrace upon either the house or your name."

"You have done so," cried Mr. Chappell, violently, "by reviving this shameful story publicly. Would not a private explanation between ourselves—between ourselves—have contented you? Then all possible misconception and implication would have been avoided."

"Implication, sir!"

"I tell you, Frederick, you do not know what you have done—you do not know what you have done!"

"If you were to say that I do not know what you mean, you would be nearer the mark. Until to-night I was as ignorant of the story as you were yourself. It came to my knowledge that a person was in this house whose presence was an insult to my mother and her guests, and I considered it my duty to warn him that his true character was discovered. I take some credit to myself for the way in which I warned him. Had he retired without joining in the conversation, no one but ourselves would have been the wiser; but he chose to brazen it out. You will bear in mind, sir, that I did not mention Mr. Barton's name, and I had no intention of doing so. A few minutes before the exposure I spoke to him privately, and gave him the opportunity of leaving the house. He refused, and grossly insulted me. Of course I could take no notice of an insult from a man in his position. The man is a cad and a black-guard—I saw it from the first day you introduced him to me, and I was astonished at your opinion of him. I forced myself to be civil to him only out of deference to your wishes."

Mrs. Chappell smiled with her son.

"Frederick is not to blame," she said. "It is a most unfortunate affair, and very awkward, and I wish it had taken place in some other house, and with some other young man. It is such a pity! But I do not see how Frederick could have acted otherwise. Your good name, Mr. Chappell, is the first consideration, and you are properly sensitive concerning it. As for any disgrace attaching to it from this affair, it is out of the question. Frederick has vindicated it by his conduct, and we have all done what we could. The unhappy young man introduced himself to you under false pretenses, and you were deceived by him—shamefully deceived—as we all were. The moment he is unmasked, you renounce him, as we all did."

"With the exception of Mr. Armstrong," put in Frederick.

"Mr. Armstrong is an eccentric character. I don't think you are on very good terms with him, Frederick?"

"I certainly am not in love with him."

"Men never will understand," said Mrs. Chappell, with an air of superior wisdom, "how necessary it is to keep on good terms with one another."

"When they heartily dislike one another," interrupted Frederick, somewhat maliciously. "No, men don't understand it. It is only women who are thoroughly up to that game."

"It shows how much more sensible women are than men. I cannot take your side, Frederick, in the coolness that exists between you and Mr. Armstrong. He is a gentleman, despite his eccentricities. And fortunately very few saw him shake hands with Mr. Barton after the exposure. What was it he said to him?"

"I did not hear."

"Well, you will see that he will cast this unhappy young man off, as we have done. Lady Barebones," she added, with a laugh, although she was not in the humor for laughing, "will be horrified when she hears what has occurred."

On the following day Lord Beaumorris called upon Mrs. Chappell. His manner was more than usually grave. Mrs. Chappell had not forgotten that she herself had introduced Richard to the old lord on the previous evening in very flattering terms, and she divined immediately that he had called for an explanation. Knowing how important an ally he was, and how necessary it was that she should enlist his sympathies on her side, she did not wait for him to throw down the glove.

"I am inexpressibly gratified to see you, my lord; I have been wishing all the day that you would come. I want to consult you, and to talk to you about the sad affair last night."

"It was—worse than sad—madam," said Lord

Beaumorris, stiffly. "It is a circumstance—I hope never again to see repeated—never again—in society."

"It grieves me more than I can express. That such a person should, by his deceit and plausible manners, obtain admission into my house, is a shock from which I shall not soon recover. But it is not for myself I feel—it is for you, my lord. That I should have been the means of introducing this person to your lordship!"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes. Lord Beaumorris was softened.

"It is that that grieves me," continued Mrs. Chappell. "What can I do to obtain your lordship's forgiveness? I knew nothing, absolutely nothing, nor did Mr. Chappell. The unfortunate young man came from the colonies with letters of recommendation from persons of high standing there. Mr. Chappell had every reason to believe these letters to be genuine, and neither he nor I entertained the slightest doubt of the young man's respectability. It shows how careful we should be. I hope you approve of my son Frederick's conduct, my lord. His suspicions were aroused, and he was determined that this person should not for one moment longer continue to occupy a false position in society: he was determined that the exposure should be complete. It was a bold course to pursue, but a manly and honorable one. Frederick is somewhat impetuous, and very sensitive on all points of honor."

It did not require a great deal more to entirely satisfy Lord Beaumorris. Mrs. Chappell did not allow him to leave her until she was assured of his support and approval. Before the day was over he publicly expressed his sympathy for Mrs. Chappell; his lead was followed even by those who were inclined to waver, and Mrs. Chappell did not lose caste because she had been the means of introducing Richard Barton into the best circles. Society declared that she was much to be pitied, and that under the circumstances she had behaved admirably.

CHAPTER III.

FROM RICHARD BARTON TO MR. ARMSTRONG, WRITTEN ON THE NIGHT OF THE EXPOSURE.

"DEAR ARMSTRONG,—The events of this night have so agitated me that I find it impossible to sleep. As a relief I take up my pen to write to you, intending to post my letter when it is finished, so that you may receive it early in the morning. The emotions under which I am laboring are not all due to the scene which Mr. Frederick Chappell seems to have carefully prepared and cunningly lead up to. My mind is agitated by other passions and doubts, which I refrain from expressing at this moment. But apart from these, I earnestly ask you to believe that the memory of your whole conduct will never leave me while I have life, and that in the midst of more than one bitter sorrow and disappointment, I find comfort in the conviction that you are still my friend. Were you to desert me, I should indeed be surrounded by darkness. I cannot express to you the grief I experienced as I stood alone in the midst of all those false friends and did not hear your voice; and but that I was prevented by pride, I should have sobbed for joy when I felt the pressure of your hand, and knew I had not lost you. I depend entirely upon you; I will be guided entirely by you. I seem myself to be utterly powerless."

"When I resolved to come home, I foolishly supposed that my task would not be a difficult one. It presents itself now to me in a very different aspect. I realize the difficulty of the task, and I see no way to its successful accomplishment. Even if I discovered Charles Davidge, I should scarcely know what to do. He must, if he be alive, be an old man by this time, and beyond my father's bare word, I have no atom of proof. But is not that sacred assertion of innocence sufficient for me? Would it not be sufficient for you? But who would take my word now? Who would listen to me? That you will really stand by me as you so generously declared, I do most sincerely believe; but if you doubted my truth or my father's innocence, I would rather that you, like the others, should renounce me."

"Forgive me for the apparent inconsistency of my words. I think that no greater grief has ever fallen upon a man than has fallen upon me to-night. You do not know all. My dearest hope is shattered, I fear."

"It occurs to me that I can give a distinct purpose to my letter. I shall not see Mr. Rigby or Laura for a little while—perhaps never again. I could not meet and converse calmly with the old man while he believes in my father's guilt. Is it not incredible that he should entertain this belief? But although he fell off from his brother, and followed the fashion of other men in raising his voice against the innocent, there was one—thank God! there was one—who clung to my father through evil as she had done through good report, and whose faith in him was never shaken. I refer to my mother. She loved my father, and was true to him. The story is a strange and romantic one, and I should wish Mr. Rigby to hear it from your lips. He was well acquainted with her when she was a girl, but I think he does not know what became of her. When my father was unjustly convicted and sent into penal servitude, he and this dear creature were engaged to one another. I am telling you the story now as my father has told it to me more than once, with tearful voice and overcharged heart. A day for their marriage had been fixed, and they were looking forward to it with hope and love. Before that day arrived, my father's career in this country was blasted. In his cell, my father's thoughts, day and night, were all of her. Did she believe him to be guilty? What would become of her if he was convicted? Should he ever hold her in his arms again? Ah, dear friend, I know how he suffered! Could you have heard him narrate the story you would have felt very tender toward him. On the day of the trial, he dreaded and hoped to see her in court; she was not

there. She afterwards told him that she strove hard to obtain admittance, but failed.

"I pass over the story of the trial; the lying evidence was given, the unjust verdict was pronounced, and sentence was passed. The ship my father was sent out to the colonies in he described as leaky and rotten, and on the day he stepped on board of her, and saw its condition, he prayed fervently that it might go down and put an end to his misery. What stung him more than all was that his brother should believe him guilty, and that the little girl he loved should desert him. As he and the other prisoners were driven on board like a flock of dangerous cattle, chained to each other, he looked wistfully and anxiously about for her face, and not seeing it, so deep a despair settled upon him that it was a mercy he did not go mad. He prayed that he might die—prayed mightily with all his heart and soul that the morrow's light would find him dead. Let me here relate an incident, which my father often dwelt upon. He was chained to a convict who was justly punished, being, according to his own confession, a cold-blooded villain. The man had been born in crime, and had lived a life of crime. My father, with a distinct intention in his mind to pray for death, strove to kneel; but he could not kneel without the consent of his companion, being chained to him, and his companion resisted. My father was the stronger, and pulled him down; and one prayed while the other cursed."

"The ship that was taking them out was taking out also a German surveying party, who occupied the saloons, and who had stewards and cabin-boys to wait upon them. When the ship had been out three or four weeks one of the stewards spoke to my father, and made as though he would like to enter into conversation; my father turned from him, and refused to answer him. He said that at that time he had made up his mind never again to hold friendly converse with any of his species. In such dire straits men must often make strange resolves. But my father's lips were unsealed by a circumstance which rendered his life on board somewhat more tolerable during the remainder of the passage. Not only among the convicts but among the sailors, were there some dangerous characters, and these banded themselves together in a plot to murder the captain and the survey party and seize the ship. That the conspiracy would have succeeded but for my father there is no reason to doubt. He waited for a favorable opportunity to reveal the plot, and when it arrived he dragged his companion by main force to the captain, and told what he knew. The danger was averted, and my father was taken from the convicts, and had a better berth assigned to him, and was better cared for. I think this saved my father's reason; his self-respect was restored to him, and he found he could still be of use."

"And now comes the singular part of the story. My father dreamed one night that the girl he loved came and bent over him and kissed him. He awoke in great agitation, thinking for a moment that it was not a dream; he saw nothing to convince him to the contrary, and he passed the whole of the night thinking of her. The ship was five months reaching its destination, and then my father dreaded that the real actual misery of his life would commence. But within a week he was allotted as a servant to a newly arrived settler, and he was taken with his papers to the log hut which his master had built. How often has my father spoke of this wonderful day! The first person he saw was his new master, who proved to be the steward who had spoken to him on board ship, and whom he had repulsed, and the first thing the steward did was to take off his whiskers and beard. Then my father saw that this man was his girl's father."

"You can almost guess the rest. Alice—that was my dear mother's name—and her father had come out in the same ship as the convicts, her father as a steward, Alice as a cabin-boy. They had to be careful on board ship, and not disclose themselves, for my father's sake. If the truth had leaked out, there would have been great difficulty in getting him allotted to them as their servant. The next minute my mother appeared, and thus strangely and under such adverse circumstances the lovers were united. What my father thought was a dream on board ship was a reality; my mother, in her boy's clothes, actually went to him while he was asleep and kissed him. She and her father watched over this cruelly wronged man during the whole of that sad time."

"Do you think that a man capable of inspiring such love and devotion could have been guilty of such a crime? My father's life was irreproachable—all who knew him loved him; and when he died no man in the South Sea colonies was more highly esteemed. Was not a life thus spent a sufficient answer to the lying charge that was brought against him in his youth? But loved and respected as he was, he was not happy; the stain that rested upon his name poisoned his days. It might have been otherwise had my dear mother lived; her sweet nature and influence might have brought permanent peace to him. I believe that it was chiefly for my sake he grieved, and that the fear was upon him that he had transmitted to me a legacy which at some time or other in my life might be used against me to my shame."

"I leave it to you to make Laura and her father acquainted with these details; it is right that they should know them. Perhaps it will induce the brother to judge the dead more charitably. Your unhappy friend, "RICHARD BARTON."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MANEUVERS OF LADY BAREBONES.

THE preparations made by Mr. Armstrong for the entertainment of his guests were so perfect and satisfactory that the event did not disappoint their expectations. For once in a way realization justified anticipation. The great charm of the party was its entire absence of formality; everybody was free to do as

he pleased, to come and go as he wished, without awkwardness, and to enjoy himself in the way that pleased him best. Mr. Armstrong, indeed, had done wonders, and had proved himself a good general.

"It is like something out of a book," said one.

"It is regularly jolly and Bohemian," said another.

This last remark became popular, especially among the young ladies, who declared that if this was the kind of life Bohemians led, they would like to become Bohemians at once and forever. Wherever the guests wandered, in the house or the grounds, they found some novelty to amuse them. Here were fountains and grottoes; here a cave with a gipsy who told fortunes; here a theatrical booth, with a dramatic performance by really good actors; and other attractions, which required seeking out, being placed in out-of-the-way nooks and corners. It was certainly open to the objection that it resembled a public more than a private entertainment, but the guests were not uncharitable enough to pause and discuss the point; they accepted their host's hospitality as freely as it was offered, and entered into the spirit of the affair with thorough enjoyment. Lady Barebones was critical and affable: she saw that such an entertainment could not be given by any but a gentleman of means, and having settled that a certain event was to occur in her family before the day was over, was in a state of high satisfaction. She instructed her eldest joy how to behave; told her she was to hold off just a little, but not sufficiently to jeopardize the proposal which Mr. Armstrong intended to make.

"It is in point of birth a misalliance," said Lady Barebones to her daughter, "for nobody seems to know who was the man's father; but he must be enormously rich. We must console ourselves with that."

To the consummation of this important event Lady Barebones devoted her fiercest energies, and she was forever on the trail of Mr. Armstrong, telling her daughter to look interesting, and now to stand here, and now to stand there, and wait for the impatient lover to declare himself. It had been her daughters' misfortune that their mother would not allow matters to take their regular course, but would insist upon flinging them at the men's heads. And the men wouldn't stand it; she had become a laughing-stock. The girls might have married fairly well but for their mother's cleverness. All the men saw through her. Certain bachelors who were in the habit of amusing themselves by observing her maneuvers, laughingly said to one another that Mr. Armstrong would be married before he knew where he was.

"I believe," said one of these heartless bachelors, "that she has a Common Prayer-book, turned down at the marriage-service, in her pocket, ready to swear him."

Another continued the theme.

"You now, before these witnesses, say 'I do' and 'I will,' and do you swear and declare that you will marry my virgin of thirty-five, and that you will endow her with—By the Lord! let's get out of the way. Here she is with her virgin, looking for him!"

Quite unconscious of the peril which threatened him, Mr. Armstrong devoted himself to his guests, and was indefatigable in promoting their enjoyment. He was entirely successful, and Mrs. Chappell was loud in her praises.

"You have inaugurated something entirely new," she said to him. "Everybody is speaking with delight of your ingenuity. The young ladies say you are a new Count of Monte Cristo. I should be afraid to guess for how many matches you will be responsible. There is a dreadful amount of flirtation going on."

"Then the mothers at least," he replied, "will have cause to be grateful to me."

Mrs. Chappell's prediction that Mr. Armstrong would drop the acquaintance of Richard Barton seemed already fulfilled, for Richard was nowhere to be seen. She had debated with herself whether, if the young Australian were present, it would be polite for her to remain, after what occurred. Not having been able to make up her mind, she had resolved to be guided by circumstances, but the point was settled for her by Richard's absence. For this reason she was more than usually gracious to the American gentleman, and more favorably disposed than she otherwise would have been to look leniently upon the presence of Laura and her father. She observed that Mr. Armstrong paid marked attention to Laura, who was pale and sad, and whom no effort on his part could rouse to animation. Laura, indeed, was suffering very keenly. When the blow had first fallen upon her she thought that its bitterness would be lessened by time, but up to the present she had failed to realize that hope. She had not seen Richard since the night of Mrs. Chappell's party, but Mr. Armstrong had faithfully fulfilled the task imposed upon him, and had read Richard's letter to Laura and her father. Hurriedly and nervously written as it was, it made a deep impression upon both, and their tears flowed freely as they heard the son's generous vindication of his dead father's honor. It awoke in the old man's mind the love which he had borne toward his brother; it recalled, with something of their old sweetness, the memories of sunny days in his youth, spent in the companionship of the man he loved; it forced him into a reconsideration of his belief in his brother's guilt, and he felt that his own life would have been happier had he been able to believe in his innocence. There was no room to doubt Richard's truth; Rigby knew that every word the young man had written came from his soul, and that his brother had made himself as much loved and respected in the land to which he had been exiled as he had been in England before the fatal charge was brought against him.

The concluding words of Richard's letter never left the old man's mind: "Perhaps it will induce the brother to judge the dead more charitably." Had he indeed been uncharitable and unjust to the dead through all these years? His tongue had not been silent. To Mr. Chappell, to Mr. Armstrong, to his own daughter,

he had, then, vilified the man whose suffering soul was now at rest. If he had judged unjustly, what unmerited torture had he inflicted upon himself—what causeless shame had darkened his days! But the reflection that most deeply pained him was this: Supposing Richard's father to have been innocent, what must have been the unfortunate man's feelings toward his brother, his nearest of kin, the one who should have been true to him in his great grief, but who deserted him when most he needed and most deserved comfort and support? "Conscious of his innocence," thought Rigby, "how bitterly he must have felt towards me! How he must have despised me! And now he is dead, and I live unforgiven for my crime." It was a crime to condemn the innocent; his brother's indignant denials of the charge came back to him with terrible force, and seemed to bring conviction with them. Mr. Armstrong saw the old man's misery, and led him gently to unburden himself, but he could give Rigby no consolation. Even when Rigby eagerly pressed him to say whether he believed in the innocence of Richard's father, Mr. Armstrong did not express himself clearly.

"In such a case," he said, "every man must decide for himself. His judgment depends upon his own nature and character, upon his sympathies, upon whether he is prone to believe, upon whether perhaps in other ways his faith has been shaken. That Richard Barton is thoroughly sincere in his belief is certain, but then all his sympathies are enlisted in the case; and besides, he is naturally generous, and prone to take the side of the weak against the strong."

"Laura suffers with me," said Rigby; "you have noticed how sorrowful she has been growing these last few days."

"Yes," replied Mr. Armstrong, gravely; "I have noticed it."

"Yet you do not know the extent of her suffering. I have striven to induce her to open her heart to me, but she will not do so. Last night I stood at her bedroom door for many minutes, and heard her sobbing. When I called to her, she was silent. Can nothing be done?"

"We must wait, and hope. What do you suppose would restore Laura to happiness?"

"To remove the cloud which hangs over her cousin—to prove my brother an innocent man."

"It is difficult—so difficult that I do not see a way. Richard was oversanguine when he came to England upon such a mission. So many years have passed—the man who suffered, justly or unjustly, is dead—no proofs exist—no papers from which a starting-point can be obtained. There is not an honest lawyer in the country who would take the case in hand; and even if one could be found, no good end would be served. As I have said, we must wait and hope."

Upon Laura Richard's letter made an impression of a different kind. She had asked Mr. Armstrong to leave the letter with her for a day or two, and she read it so often that she could have repeated it word for word. Her thoughts dwelt almost solely upon the truth and constancy of the woman who had loved Richard's father. Loving him, she had sacrificed every thing for him. She had stood fearlessly before the world, saying, "You have declared him guilty; I know him to be innocent." She had given that wounded heart the shelter of her faithful love; it was true womanhood, true heroism. "I am not capable of such an act of sacrifice," thought Laura. "Richard has heard that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Armstrong; he contrasts my conduct with that of his mother, and he despises me." From certain hints dropped by Mrs. Fangle, Laura more than suspected that Richard believed she had loved him, and, continuing her sad musings, she said to herself that he would think she had deliberately played with his feelings, and had cast him off because of the disgrace which was attached to his name. And yet how proud she would be to share it! She longed, yet dreaded, to see him. She doubted, if she offered him her sympathy, whether he would believe in her sincerity. She feared even to mention Richard's name to Mr. Armstrong, lest he should discover her secret.

CHAPTER V.

LORD BEAUMORRIS MAKES A SPEECH.

THE course of our story leads us to a pretty and somewhat retired spot in the gardens, where a party, composed of Lord Beaumorris, Mrs. Chappell, Mr. Armstrong, and some half a dozen others, had been dining. The guests were in the full height of enjoyment. There was dancing in the largest room of the house, where a famous band was stationed. Night was coming on, and the lamps in the gardens were lighted. The attraction of a fountain where illuminated waters were playing had drawn away a large number of the guests, and the table around which Mr. Armstrong and his friends were seated was in comparative privacy. Availing himself of this privacy, Lord Beaumorris did, for him, an unprecedented thing.

"I take advantage," said the old lord, rising, "of the absence of conventionality—so necessary an element—in all private gatherings—but so charmingly conspicuous here—by its absence—to ask you—as a particular favor—favor—to charge your glasses."

His request being complied with, Lord Beaumorris absolutely made a speech.

He was, he said, inspired by the magnificent and princely hospitality of their host, a gentleman whose friendship he was proud to possess—(here he bowed in a courtly manner to Mr. Armstrong)—to perform what was at once a duty and a pleasure. It was unusual, he was aware, but he relied upon their generosity and their sympathy to excuse him, if they considered he was committing a breach of good manners. Had their host been an English gentleman he might have hesitated, but the happy opportunity should not be allowed to slip of drinking the health of the nation to which

Mr. Armstrong had the proud privilege of being a citizen—he referred, of course, to America. While he expressed his admiration of the happy thought which made this delightful gathering so different from all other delightful gatherings, he expressed also the hope that the flag which—quoting from a song he had heard in his youth—has braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze, and the flag graced with the emblems of stars and stripes, would always wave side by side in peace and concord.

Coming from any lips on such an occasion, these sentiments would have been well received; coming from such a personage as Lord Beaumorris, their reception was enthusiastic. The toast was drunk with cordiality, and Mr. Armstrong briefly expressed his acknowledgments.

"How eloquently you expressed all our feelings, my lord!" said Mrs. Chappell, as the little party moved from the table. "Ah, what a happy privilege it is to be a man, if only for the purpose of being allowed to speak as you have done."

"The happiest privilege," replied Lord Beaumorris, gallantly, "a man—that is, a gentleman possesses—my dear madam—is the being allowed—to pay devotion to the sex—without whose presence we should be—hem! nothing at all." And Lord Beaumorris really looked as if he thought he had said something very wise.

"Oh, my lord!" sighed Mrs. Chappell, responding for her sex, and making a profound courtesy.

"I cannot sufficiently," said Lord Beaumorris, turning to Mr. Armstrong, and looking around upon the animated scene, "express my admiration of this gathering. There is a—a halo—if I may be allowed to use the term—about it—which renders it pleasant to a delightful—delightful degree."

"A very novel part of the entertainment is to come, my lord," remarked Mrs. Chappell.

"Indeed, my dear madam, indeed!"

"Mr. Armstrong has promised to give us some proof of his powers as a mesmerist."

Mr. Armstrong could not avoid looking annoyed at this reference; he had given no farther thought to the matter.

"I shall be delighted," said Lord Beaumorris.

"I thought," said Mr. Armstrong, addressing himself to Mrs. Chappell, "you had forgotten that."

"Forgotten a promise! And I a woman!"

"They do sometimes forget, do they not?"

"As the lawyers say, they reserve a point. They only forget when it does not please them to remember."

"You can scarcely call it a promise. You extracted it from me under compulsion, and as I have in no way prepared for it, I am sufficiently jesuitical to plead a mental reservation."

Mrs. Chappell shook her head. Mr. Armstrong endeavored to change the subject.

"Mr. Chappell has not come yet, has he?"

"He sent me a note saying it was an important day with him, and that he would be late. But indeed, indeed, I will not be diverted from the subject."

"Let it drop, I beg of you."

"No," replied Mrs. Chappell, with remarkable pertinacity; "I intend to insist upon the fulfillment of your promise. My lord, I appeal to you. When a gentleman gives a promise, however lightly, should he not perform it?"

"Undoubtedly, my dear madam—undoubtedly."

"Unless," said Mr. Armstrong, "the lady or gentleman to whom he unwittingly gave the promise releases him."

"In that case," observed Lord Beaumorris, with all the gravity he would have given to a nice point of honor, "he is absolved certainly."

"But I do not absolve you," said Mrs. Chappell, pleasantly. "We ladies like to exercise our power when we have the opportunity."

Mr. Armstrong was nettled at her pertinacity, but he had the good breeding to conceal his annoyance. He was not aware that Mrs. Chappell had privately informed two of her most distinguished lady friends who were present that Mr. Armstrong had, at her earnest solicitation, consented to give some exhibition of the power which she persisted in ascribing to him.

"Remember, my dear madam," said Mr. Armstrong, "that I lay no claim to being a mesmerist. When I have spoken of the subject—which is but rarely—I have merely stated that I have some sort of a belief in it. You give me credit for what I do not in the least deserve."

"You are too modest."

"You forget that I am an American."

"And cannot resist the temptation of turning the shaft of ridicule even against yourself. I refuse to release you from your promise. Like most of my sex, the more difficulties there are in the way the more I am resolved. Mr. Armstrong is quite a magician, my lord."

"I might startle you."

"That convinces me," said Mrs. Chappell, with an agreeable smile, shaking her finger at him, "that you are not ingenuous in your denial of your powers. I am in the mood to be startled."

Lord Beaumorris, by this time, had become interested in the conversation.

"I do not think he," he said, "that you can escape—our fair friend. Will you be kind enough—to explain the matter to me? I do not quite—quite understand it. Did I not read—some time ago—of a lady—a stout lady—moved by spiritual agency—from her own house—to a house a mile or two away? Spirited though the air—chair and all!"

"Those are the stories and tricks of charlatans, my lord, which dupes are led to believe in. Mrs. Chappell, I am sure, does not believe me capable of taking part in such mummery. As I understand, the magic of which she wished to see a proof is merely the effect produced by a strongly concentrated will over the weak or disturbed mental condition of another person. Given, circumstances favorable to such an exhibition,

his is not very difficult of accomplishment. In a more or less powerful degree almost every person can be so impressed. To that extent I am a believer, but I should not care to pledge myself farther. If an opportunity offers, I will endeavor to oblige Mrs. Chappell."

"And if it does not offer," said Mrs. Chappell, "you must really make one before the night is over."

Mr. Armstrong shrugged his shoulders; he felt that it would be useless and ungracious to continue the subject. Mrs. Chappell came close to him.

"You may require a friend," she said softly.

He looked at her inquiringly.

"Not for yourself," continued Mrs. Chappell, with an arch smile. "For some one else, perhaps."

"I do not understand you."

She tapped his arm with her fan reproachfully.

"You should confide in me. Very little escapes an observant lady's eyes. What makes that young lady so sad?"

She pointed to Laura, who was sitting alone, with her hands clasped in her lap, and her eyes toward the ground.

"I ask you because I have noticed you have paid her conspicuous attention. Have you really lost your heart there?"

Mr. Armstrong scarcely knew what reply to make. It had been his distinct intention to introduce Laura as his intended wife to Mrs. Chappell, and, through that lady, to make it known to his guests; but something had held him back.

"How would it be received," he asked, "if it were so? We are speaking in perfect confidence now." Mrs. Chappell nodded. "What would society say?"

"I repeat, you will require a friend. Lady Barebones would be furious. But is it really so?"

"You shall know before the night is over. In the meantime—"

"In the meantime I am discretion itself. I have two things to look forward to now. Will you give me your arm, my lord?"

Mr. Armstrong approached Laura. She started almost guiltily as he stood before her. She had not been thinking of him. The night was very lovely. Soft strains of music floated from the ball-room.

"Does nothing here give you pleasure, Laura?"

Her eyes filled with tears at the tenderness of his tone. She was in that state of tremulous sensitiveness that a kind word was sufficient to arouse emotion within her.

"When I planned this entertainment," he continued, "I was very anxious to know what you would think of this or that. But nothing seems to interest you. I am afraid my labor has been thrown away."

"Not thrown away," she said gently. "There is not a person here who does not appreciate your efforts. All are enjoying themselves as much as you could wish."

"All but one," he rejoined, in a tone as gentle as her own. "I should be content to see frowns on every face if I could see a smile on yours. I have been called a magician to-night. I would I were one, for then I might be able to exercise my art to make you cheerful, and to bring the roses to your cheeks. Perhaps you have not yet learned to fully trust me. Believe me, Laura, there is nothing in my power I would not do to make you happy."

"I am not worthy of your goodness," she said, holding out her hand to him.

"Nay, nay—"

"Do not think me ungrateful. I am not well—I have not been well since that dreadful night; I get tired so soon. But you must not be anxious about me."

"Since that dreadful night," he repeated. "Your father has told me how you have suffered. Is there anything in your mind in connection with that night that I ought to know. Be frank with me, my dear."

She could not, she dared not, open her heart to him.

"It grieves me to believe"—"But she paused, and hung her head."

"Go on, my dear."

"It grieves me to believe that people will think you have made a mistake"—Again she faltered.

"I will not affect to misunderstand you. That I have made a mistake in asking you to be my wife?"

"Yes."

His countenance brightened. "I know that I have made no mistake. What shall you and I care for what people believe, so long as we believe in each other? Why, my dear," he said with animation, "if you felt the slightest uneasiness on that account, we three—you, your father, and I—would settle in America after we were married. We can be as happy there as here—happier, perhaps. In a new country your father would be a new man; I can realize what a weight would be lifted from his heart if he moved among people every one of whom would be glad and proud to shake hands with him, for his own sake and mine. You did not know that I have land and a house on the Hudson, where the scenery is at once the grandest and the most lovely in the world. It is the house in which I was born, and my family is honored and respected there; old friends would cluster around us, and give a hearty welcome to my English wife; and we would live our lives there peacefully and happily. I see it all, and you have but to say the word. I know what your father's answer would be if the proposition were made to him, and how rejoiced he would be to bid good-bye forever to the place in which he has passed so many unhappy years." He spoke like a boy; the prospect was, indeed, a pleasant one to him. "This is no dream that I am indulging in, Laura; say that you would like it to be reality, and we will make it so. My heart glows as I think of it. But we can talk over this soberly by-and-by. Let us come back to the present. With regard to what people would say, I had it in my mind to make our engagement public to-night, but it occurs to me that I have no right to do so without your sanction. Shall I do so?"

"If you wish—if it pleases you."

"But then my guests must not see you sad and melancholy. I should like them to see you looking bright and happy."

"I will strive to be cheerful."

She called up a smile to her face; he regarded her with earnest attention, and his voice was more subdued when he spoke again.

"I have only your happiness at heart, child. You are thinking, perhaps, of your cousin."

"I have thought much of him," she said, almost in a whisper.

"If it will comfort you in any way, let me assure you I have not forgotten my promise to him. This very day a step has been taken in the direction that he wished. I ask but this—let there be no cloud between you and me, no doubt, no mistrust."

The appearance of a servant with letters and a newspaper caused him to pause.

"The last edition of *The Moon*, sir," said the man, "and some letters which I was told to give you at once."

Mr. Armstrong opened one of the letters, the writing on which was familiar to him, and read: "I have followed out your instructions. To-day I have closed my account with Mr. Chappell's bank." Then he glanced hastily down the columns of *The Moon*, and a peculiar smile came to his lips.

"I must leave you, Laura, he said, "Ah, here is our friend, Mrs. Fangle." He called to her. "Mrs. Fangle, come and see what you can do to drive melancholy from our bird here. I give her into your charge; I will return in a few minutes."

"A little this way, my dear," said Mrs. Fangle to Laura, with a cautious air. "There's that dreadful Lady Barebones—no, she has turned off, thank goodness! She is following Mr. Armstrong. My dear, he is here. You know who. He wants to see you. Poor gentleman! it was I who deceived him; I told him you loved him!"

"Hush!" interrupted Laura, with an entreating motion of her hands. "Do not torture me, Mrs. Fangle, if you love me!"

"You know I love you, my dear. Torture you, after all your kindness to me! But he has been kind to me, too—if you knew all he has done for me! Poor dear! He is so heart-broken that I could not tell him the fresh trouble that has fallen upon me."

"A fresh trouble, Mrs. Fangle! The world seems full of nothing but unhappiness."

"I have found it so. When you come to my age, I hope your cup will not be so full of sorrow as mine is. But there! we must hope for the best. I didn't come here to speak of myself. Mr. Barton is determined to see you. It isn't for me to interfere, but I must say I think he has been badly treated. He asked me to give you this note."

Laura took the note mechanically, and with a sob which she could not suppress turned from Mrs. Fangle, and left that worthy woman standing alone, in a state of utter amazement.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FANGLE FINDS HIMSELF IN A PECULIAR POSITION.

If Mrs. Fangle's amazement had found expression in words, she would have soliloquized in the following fashion:

"I can't make it out. The whole thing is in a tangle, and everybody appears to be playing at cross-purposes. If ever a woman was led to suppose that a girl loved a man, I was led to suppose that Laura loved Mr. Barton. It was as plain as a pikestaff, and everything seemed to be settled and likely to go on as merrily as marriage-bells. I tell him she loves him, and he is ready to jump out of his skin for joy. I tell her that he intends to propose to her, and no girl in the world could look happier. Then all of a sudden, within a few minutes, everything is at sixes and sevens, and the poor young fellow is as good as jilted. There is something going on between Laura and Mr. Armstrong, but Laura has not confided in me; and when I have gently intimated that I would like to know, I get no satisfaction. Mr. Armstrong is as good a man as ever wore shoeleather, but he isn't to be compared to the other. He is rich; so is the other. He is a gentleman; so is the other. There they are equal enough. But Mr. Barton is a handsome young fellow, and Mr. Armstrong is old enough to be his father. Why should she prefer Mr. Armstrong, then, when I know—yes, I am confident of it—that she loves Mr. Barton? He called her his 'Bird,' that sounds plain. I can't make it out. Does the girl know her own mind, or doesn't she—or are girls different nowadays to what they were when I was a girl? I am afraid they are—I am afraid they are. The world isn't as good as it was. But I have enough troubles of my own, I am sure, without bothering myself about the troubles of others. I don't know which way to turn. Things have come now to such a pass that it would be a mercy if I could go to sleep, and not wake up again. But, then, what would the poor children do? It isn't their fault, the innocent dears! Since Fangle went away this afternoon a bailiff has been put into the house for rent. What am I to do? There's the man sitting at home, there, with his pot of beer and his pipe, and the children crying, and all the lodgers threatening to leave. I told Fangle, weeks and weeks ago, that he must give me some money for the landlord, and he told me, as usual, to wait for his invention. His invention! Where does he keep it? I've never seen it. What is it all about? Nobody knows, and Fangle won't say. He keeps on saying that he can't get that little screw right. I wonder if everybody in the world has a little screw that he can't get right—like Fangle! Here he comes, looking as if he had ten thousand a year."

At this point of her musings, and while she was wiping her eyes, for she had worked herself into a state of tearful nervousness, Mr. Fangle sauntered toward

her, with a paper in his hand—his favorite paper, *The Moon*.

"Mrs. Fangle!" he exclaimed, bombastically. "In tears!"

Mrs. Fangle, not being able to find her voice, went on crying.

"Good heavens, madam!" blustered Mr. Fangle. "What would people say if they saw you?"

"I—I don't know, Fangle," gasped the little woman.

"You don't know! But I do know. They would say Fangle has been ill-treating his wife. Think of that, madam."

He looked virtuously and stormily indignant. Meekness itself when absent from the domestic nest, he was a perfect tyrant in it. This dual character, in the aspect here presented and its opposite, is played successfully by many of our acquaintances. And yet Mr. Fangle considered himself one of the best of husbands, and he had so subjugated Mrs. Fangle that she never dared to say in his presence what she had been heard to say in his absence—that she couldn't call her soul her own while Fangle was in the house.

"My character is at stake, madam," he continued. "Dry your eyes, and look pleasant before any one comes. If you don't do it instantly, I—I must run away."

He would have put his threat into execution if Mrs. Fangle had not mustered courage to lay hold of his coat-tail.

"I can't help it, Fangle," she said. "I can't look pleasant if I don't feel pleasant. You don't know what has occurred at home."

"Good heavens! Is the place burned down?"

"Worse than that, Fangle. The landlord called for his rent this afternoon."

Mr. Fangle put his hand before his mouth, and stifled a cough.

"Is that all!" he exclaimed, with assumed indifference.

"No, Fangle."

"No, Fangle—no, Fangle!" he iterated. "Why can't you speak plainly, instead of dribbling it out? But it's your way—it always was your way. You always were a dribbler. You're enough to vex a saint, Mrs. Fangle. With what I have in my head, can I be expected to worry myself about these small matters? Think of the invention. The landlord has called for his rent before. Is that a cause for tears? You told him to wait, of course."

"Yes, Fangle."

"And he promised to wait, of course."

"No, Fangle. He said he had called so many times that he would be—you know what, Fangle—if he called again. He brought a man with him, and said (in the same way as before) that he wouldn't wait another hour. He went away, and left the man."

Mr. Fangle stared at her.

"The man was a bailiff, Fangle."

"A bailiff! Gracious powers! But did you not try to prevent this—inconvenience?" ("Disgrace" was the first word that occurred to him, but he substituted "inconvenience" as less objectionable). "Did you not tell him about the invention, and that there was only one little screw—?"

"I did, Fangle; I begged and implored him not to put the man in. I'll tell you exactly what he said. 'I'll wait another week,' he said, 'if you will give me an idea what Mr. Fangle's invention is like. I have heard him say—the man's own words, Fangle—I have heard him say that it will bring in millions some day; but I can't wait so long as that. Still, for such a big thing I don't mind waiting another week, if you will give me an idea to live upon.' What could I say to that, Fangle? I don't know what the invention is, any more than the man in the moon. And when I answered that I couldn't tell him, he said that—that—"

"That—that what, Mrs. Fangle?" cried Mr. Fangle, glaring at his wife. "This is no time for stuttering!"

"I am afraid to tell you what the man said, Fangle."

"Tell it, madam, tell it." And Mr. Fangle folded his arms sternly.

"Don't be angry with me, Fangle. He said he believed you were a Humbug, my dear, and he didn't believe a word about that little screw."

A guilty look shot into Mr. Fangle's eyes; but still he contrived to say, with a composure in his manner which he strove to make stately:

"He called me a Humbug!"

"Yes, Fangle."

Mr. Fangle drew a deep breath, after the manner of one who has received an indignity, and who has no means of resenting it.

"And you permitted it?"

"What could I do, Fangle? I have begged of you to let me have some money for the rent—and there are the children running about almost barefoot!"

"Money, madam, money!" exclaimed Mr. Fangle, looking around to make sure he was not overheard. "Money is not the question. Is it possible that when this—this person said I was a Humbug, you did not ask him how he dared—yes, dared, Mrs. Fangle—to vilify a man of genius, and your husband, behind his back?"

"No, Fangle, I didn't ask him."

"And may I inquire, madam," said Mr. Fangle, poking his head forward, and glaring at his wife more intensely, "as your husband and the father of your children, may I inquire why you didn't ask him?"

"Because, Fangle," replied Mrs. Fangle, now completely overcome, and in sheer desperation speaking what was in her mind, "because, Fangle—I—begin—to—suspect—that—the—man—was—right."

And then, afraid of what would follow this declaration of treason, Mrs. Fangle fled.

The effect of her words upon Mr. Fangle—distilled as they were, one by one, like bitter drops, with a pause between each—was extraordinary. He gasped, he turned white, he trembled, and seemed, little as he was, to shrink within himself and become less. Immediately before him, on a pedestal, was a statue, representing a satyr, the figure of which leaned forward,

with outstretched arm and mocking finger. There was an ugly grin on the countenance of the statue, and Mr. Fangle, unconscious of the appropriate expression, looked straight into the face of the satyr, and uttered these remarkable words:

"SHE HAS FOUND ME OUT."

CHAPTER VII.

OPEN CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL.

"Yes," continued Mr. Fangle, addressing the stone figure, "my wife has found me out. I am a Humbug, and my invention is a myth, little screw and all! I haven't invented anything, miserable man that I am! If the world makes the discovery as well as Mrs. Fangle and the landlord, I am a ruined man. For the world will forgive you for being a Humbug, and if you are successful will admire you for it; but it will never forgive you for being found out. That is the world's morality. The bailiff is in the house! I must get some money, somehow. But how—how—how?" The grin on the satyr's face seemed to broaden, and to become more distorted as Mr. Fangle gave utterance to his perplexity. "What is the meaning of the advertisement in to-nights *Moon* offering a reward of five hundred pounds for information concerning Charles Davidge? Five hundred pounds! A fortune! Now I know who Charles Davidge is, and if the advertisement is not a hoax, I might earn the money, and with it hoodwink my wife, defy the bailiff, and snap my fingers in the landlord's face? What does the advertisement say?" He referred to the paper: "A reward of five hundred pounds will be paid to the first person who will give information as to whether a man, named Charles Davidge, many years ago a clerk in the bank of Chappell, Chappell, and Chappell, is still living, and where he is to be found. Apply by letter, to Vindicator, office of this paper. Vindicator! who is Vindicator, and what does he want to vindicate? I have always suspected that Mr. Armstrong has something to do with *The Moon*. Perhaps he knows something about the advertisement, and would advise me."

While he was debating whether he should go at once in search of Mr. Armstrong, that gentleman himself appeared, and laid his hand familiarly on Mr. Fangle's shoulder.

"Studying politics, Mr. Fangle?"

"No—no, not exactly politics."

Being thus taken by surprise, Mr. Fangle scarcely knew how to commence.

"Shall I guess what is in your mind?" Mr. Fangle looked at him apprehensively. "A weightier subject than politics fills it, doubtless. You are puzzling your brain over your invention."

"Yes—partly—hem!"

"And how is it really getting along, Mr. Fangle? Does that little screw still refuse to come right?"

A dreadful fear took possession of Mr. Fangle. "Has he, too, found me out?" he thought. "Would it be advisable to make a clean breast of it?" He spoke aloud, in his perplexity, scarcely knowing what he said. "The fact is, Mr. Armstrong, money is wanting, I am short—always have been short, from my cradle upward."

"Indeed," observed Mr. Armstrong, with the air of a man to whom a new view of an interesting question was unexpectedly presented.

"Men of genius," pursued Mr. Fangle, "always are short, I believe—short, that is, of money."

"If that misfortune be confined to men of genius, they must be more abundant than I supposed."

"It is my unfortunate position, Mr. Armstrong."

"Not a novel position to you, I fear," said Mr. Armstrong; with the slightest shade of irony in his tone, and the doubt whether Mr. Armstrong had made the same discovery as his wife and his landlord recurred again to Mr. Fangle's mind.

"Unhappily, sir, it is not, I have been in a state of impecuniosity for more years than I would care to name. If I thought you would befriend me—"

"You may regard me as your friend, Mr. Fangle, in any reasonable way."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. Ah, there are few hearts like yours in the world! You see me, sir, with *The Moon* in my hand. A great paper—a *multum in parvo*. The people, sir, have adopted this paper as their own. It is within their reach."

"Truly, then," interrupted Mr. Armstrong, with grave sarcasm, "the child is father to the man. Children, you know, cry for the moon."

Mr. Fangle laughed, as was advisable, at Mr. Armstrong's facetiousness. He was always ready to laugh at the latest jokes from the tongue of a rich man. "When you came across me, sir, I was reading an advertisement in *The Moon*. Here it is, sir. A reward of five hundred pounds—"

"I have seen the advertisement."

"We are in confidence, Mr. Armstrong. I pledge myself that what passes shall not be divulged by me. I have lately heard that you have an interest in the paper—that you are in some way connected with it."

"I have influence with the paper, if you mean that."

"I do mean that. Now, sir, who is 'Vindicator,' and is this advertisement for the discovery of Charles Davidge genuine? I know who Charles Davidge is."

Mr. Armstrong became suddenly interested. "This is news to me."

"I know him, sir. Perhaps you do not. I knew years ago, but I never considered it of the slightest importance. Why, sir, I could lay my hands on him at this moment. But I might get myself into trouble. If I were not afraid that this advertisement is a hoax—"

"You, a man of genius, afraid!" Mr. Armstrong raised his hands in mock amazement.

"It is a peculiarity of men of genius to be always a little bit timorous, I believe."

"But five hundred pounds!"

"Is tempting—to-me—just now. A man is occasionally compelled to be mercenary. That little screw is still bothering me—to say nothing of Mrs. Fangle and the children."

"Of what importance can they be, compared with the screw?"

"Of no importance whatever," replied Mr. Fangle, hastily, and as hastily correcting himself. "That is, of none comparatively."

"It appears, Mr. Fangle, that you would like my advice in this matter."

"I should, sir—if you will give it. A gentleman of your ability!"

"Not to be spoken of in the same breath as yours, Mr. Fangle."

"You flatter me, sir," said Mr. Fangle, complacently; "you flatter me."

"Not at all. How can I flatter you? What am I? A simple speculator, a mere money-bag. What are you? A man of genius, who will soon give to the world the result of years of thought. No wonder that, under such circumstances, you are oblivious of wife and children. What laurels will you earn when you make your invention known, Mr. Fangle! I have always thought it an injustice that the poet should monopolize the bay-leaf."

Mr. Fangle listened with no pleasant feelings to this speech, for it was impossible even for him not to detect its ridicule and sarcasm. But at the word "bay-leaf," which in his agitation he construed into bailiff, he started back as though a pistol were presented at his head.

"The bailiff!" he muttered in dismay. "I have the bailiff at home, in possession of my chairs and tables. The poet does not monopolize the bailiff. I see it all."

He was no longer in doubt. Mr. Armstrong had "found him out." There was but one course open to him. He would make a clean breast of it, and would throw himself upon Mr. Armstrong's mercy. He acted upon his resolution with feverish haste.

"Mr. Armstrong, I want to make a confession."

"But my advice first," interposed Mr. Armstrong.

"No, sir, no. I beg of you; my confession first."

"As you please. I am all attention."

"You are a humane man—you are a rich man. Ah, what a thing it is to be rich and removed from temptation! You do not know what poverty is, and to what lengths it drives a man. The confession I am about to make has been on my lips a dozen times, but I have not had the courage to speak. May I beg you will keep the secret I am about to confide to you?"

"Certainly I will, if you desire it."

"You see before you, sir," said Mr. Fangle, in a faltering voice, "a miserable man, with a wife and children in a chronic state of want. I pity them, sir, but I cannot help them. Mrs. Fangle has given me the distressing intelligence that at this present moment a bailiff is in my house."

"I am truly sorry—for your wife and children."

It is for them I feel, not for myself, for I alone am to blame. The fact is, sir—he glanced around cautiously, and approached closer to Mr. Armstrong—"I make the confession with humiliation—the fact is, sir, I am a Humbug."

"A what, Mr. Fangle!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong, with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"A Humbug, sir—a Humbug!"

The position was a new one to Mr. Fangle, and now that he had unburdened himself of his secret, he scarcely knew how to act. Should he weep, or clasp his hands, or clutch at his hair? He compromised matters by making a motion as though he would beat his breast. Mr. Armstrong watched him with a certain air of enjoyment.

"It is a fact, sir," continued the sinner. "Do not despise me—do not betray me—do not forsake me. I do not remember how my inventions first came to be spoken of, but I knew that it was first spoken of in a small way, which gradually grew into a big one. I traded upon it, I am ashamed to say. There was a charm about it; at first, but when it was too late I found I had created a monster from which I could not escape. It will be the ruin of me, sir, unless a piece of great good luck falls to my share, for I cannot keep up the deception much longer. My landlord has lost faith in me, my wife and you have found me out, and I can see now that other persons besides yourself must be getting doubtful of my little screw."

He did not find it so unpleasant as he had anticipated. It seemed actually as though a weight were lifted from his heart—and then, his flow of words was a consolation to him.

"You astonish me," said Mr. Armstrong.

"When I discovered that I was, as it were, chained to my monster—when I found out that without loss of credit and reputation it was impossible for me to escape from it, I tried to invent something. I bought some little magnets, and experimented with them upon a small iron wheel, thinking I might discover a new motor, or perhaps perpetual motion. Persons saw my magnets—my monster led me on to exhibit them in an off-hand manner—and they gave a fatal color to my professions. I need not tell you I did not discover perpetual motion, nor anything else. It will surprise you to learn, sir, that I am not a clever man."

"Wonders will never cease," said Mr. Armstrong, who could not help feeling amused at Mr. Fangle's candor.

"I have confided in you, sir, and I feel relieved. And now, Mr. Armstrong, as a proof that you do not entirely despise me, will you lend me half a sovereign? To give to my wife, sir—to give to my wife, upon my honor, as, in some measure, an atonement. If I went to her empty-handed I should not be able to look her in the face."

Mr. Armstrong, without demur, handed Mr. Fangle a piece of gold.

"Ah, sir, you touch me upon my tenderest point! All Fangle's dreams are now at an end."

"Not quite all, perhaps, Mr. Fangle. You have not listened to my advice yet."

Mr. Fangle's manner became more animated. "Ah, yes, sir; about that advertisement."

"You want to put the bailiff out of the house?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you say you know who Charles Davidge is?"

"I am certain I do, morally certain—that is, if such an impostor as I can be morally any thing."

"Very well. Now, listen. The advertisement is not a hoax. Presently, when you see me, Mr. and Mrs. Chappell, Lord Beaumorris, old Mr. Rigby, and others together—I will contrive the meeting—publicly—I claim who Charles Davidge is, and I will insure you a reward."

"You advise this seriously?"

"Seriously. You will have to take my cue for the proper time for the disclosure."

"I'll do it, sir. I will watch my opportunity, and will do it. You are, indeed, a friend. And then, sir, then," he said, with a jubilant air, "when I get the five hundred pounds, no one but ourselves need know that I am a—you know what."

"No one shall know it from me, Mr. Fangle."

Mr. Fangle rubbed his hands. "A million thanks, my more than benefactor."

"Although I shrewdly suspect," said Mr. Armstrong, looking around cautiously, in imitation of Mr. Fangle, "that it is known to many others as well as ourselves."

"You don't say so! It is a mystery how they could have discovered it. But it does not matter. If I get the money, I shall be able to bear the shock. I must go to Mrs. Fangle and tell her the good news."

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS OF THE "GOLDEN MARINER."

MR. FANGLE went one way in search of his wife, Mr. Armstrong went another in search of Laura. The remembrance of his young life in his parents' house on the banks of the Hudson—remembrances called up by his last conversation with Laura—had stirred him deeply. He thought of those peaceful days now, with something of yearning; for he had almost quite made up his mind to settle again in the old place, after his marriage. London was filled with distressing associations to Laura and her father, and they would be happier in a new country. "I shall get used to it after a while," he said, "and shall be grateful to be away from the whirl and whirr of the fevered city." He drew plans and pictures of the future, which love was to sweeten and make beautiful. He felt like a boy again, and his heart glowed with gratitude and tenderness toward the girl who had brought this sweet joy into his life. Until he met Laura he had never indulged in the hope which now animated him; sometimes he sighed to think that his life, to the end, would be utterly lonely, but he used to thrust such thoughts sternly from his mind. If it was to be, it was to be, and he must bear it the best way he could. The idea of marrying a woman he did not love simply that she might be a companion to him never found a place in his mind. It is probable that, he questioned himself, he would have decided that he was incapable of love—with what a deep injustice those who knew him through these pages will understand, unless I have drawn his character with an unskillful hand. But now all was changed. Love had come to him, and the brightest chapters in his life were about to commence.

He had not proceeded many steps in his search for Laura when he saw Frederick Chappell. He would have avoided the young man could he have done so without observation, but Frederick, seeing him, approached him with the intention of speaking to him. He received the young man courteously. Frederick's face was flushed, and it appeared to Mr. Armstrong as though he had been drinking.

"I am glad I have come across you," said Frederick abruptly. "The governor asked me if I had seen you."

"I did not know your father was here."

"He has been here for a quarter of an hour, and a nice temper he is in. I couldn't understand what was the matter with him, until I found out for myself, without his telling me."

"Nothing has gone wrong, I hope?"

"I am in doubt as to what you call wrong," replied Frederick in an arrogant tone; "our notions are somewhat at variance."

Mr. Armstrong bent his head gravely. Standing in the relation of a host to his guest, his manner toward Frederick was very different from what it would have been in any house but his own.

"Will you be kind enough to explain?" he asked, with grave politeness.

"It is we who ought to ask for an explanation," said Frederick. "I suppose this is not a public garden, where anybody can enter by paying at the gates."

"I suppose it is not," returned Mr. Armstrong, calmly.

"It looks something like it, I must say," said Frederick, with a sneer.

"Have you been drinking, Mr. Chappell?"

"That is a nice question for you to ask—here. I have tasted your wine."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Armstrong, biting his lips; "I am properly rebuked. But really your manner is so excited, and your words so strange, that there is some excuse for my forgetting myself. I beg you to explain."

"All who are here are here by invitation, I suppose!"

"No person should be here uninvited."

"There is a person here who has no right to intrude himself into the society of ladies and gentlemen; I suppose my father has seen him, and takes a proper view of the matter—that is, unless the blackguard has sneaked in by bribing the footman. In which case I take it you will see that he is kicked out."

"Give the person a name, Mr. Chappell," said Mr.

Armstrong, with a slight frown. "Then we shall better understand each other."

"The person's name is Richard Barton,"

"Oh, Mr. Barton. He didn't sneak in. I invited him."

"Before or since the night of his exposure?" demanded Frederick, insolently.

"Really, Mr. Chappell, I cannot see that I am bound to answer all your questions."

"You are bound, as a gentleman, to answer this, for it is a question affecting one's honor and character. Remember, if you please, that Mr. and Mrs. Chappell are here, and that it was in my mother's house this person was unmasked."

"Well, sir, I yield. I invited Mr. Barton after that night."

"And do you intend to allow him to remain?"

"Certainly, if he wishes it."

"What! The son of a convicted thief?"

"Nay, nay," interrupted Mr. Armstrong, in a most decided tone. "There is no occasion for words over it. This is not the first time you and I have disagreed. I pray you to remember that you are my guest."

"His presence here is an insult to your guests."

"I lay restrictions on no one. Those who do not wish to stay are free to go."

"I understand the hint. But there is another view of the matter which perhaps escapes you. Miss Rigby is here also."

"Well, sir."

"Since my arrival I have heard whispers"—

"I decline further conversation, Mr. Chappell. There are some subjects I will not permit myself to discuss with you. This is one."

"As you please," said Frederick, with a light laugh. "I know, however, that I would not allow the previous lover of the young lady to whom it was reported I was paying my addresses to prowl about my grounds for the purpose of making love to her."

He would have said more, but Mr. Armstrong's manner warned him to desist.

"Sir," said the American, in a tone of suppressed passion, "you forget that the laws of hospitality are binding no less upon the guest than upon the host. Were it not for that—" But his emotion was so great that he could not proceed.

Frederick Chappell took up his words. "Were it not for that, or the scandal attaching to it, you would probably commit some act in harmony with your character and that of your friend. Oh, you cannot frighten me. I shall acquaint Mr. and Mrs. Chappell with the fact which I considered it necessary first to communicate to you—hardly believing that you were an accessory to it—and we shall then see whether they and other ladies and gentlemen who are here will continue to accept hospitality accompanied by so gross an insult." He was about to turn away, but checked himself to say deliberately, "On another occasion within your remembrance I was successful in placing society on its guard. It may be that to-night I shall have to repeat the lesson."

He was allowed to depart in silence. So agitated was Mr. Armstrong by tumultuous thought that he could not trust himself to speak. The reference which Frederick had made to Richard as Laura's lover was the cause of this, and he found himself suddenly battling in a sea of doubt, into which he had been plunged by two or three light words spoken by an enemy. But his nature was not such as could long harbor ungenerous suspicion. Relieved of Frederick's presence, he flung aside the doubt as unworthy of him, unworthy of Laura. Then came indignation at the other portion of Frederick's words: "It may be that to-night I shall have to repeat the lesson." A disdainful smile curved his lips as he thought it might be in his own power this very night to turn the tables on the insolent speaker. A servant interrupted his musings by handing him a telegram. He tore it open, and read:

"A boat has been picked up at sea with two sailors in it, the sole survivors of the *Golden Mariner*. Their narrative confirms the rumors which were current some time since. The vessel was lost in a storm."

With strange eagerness, he replaced the telegram in the torn envelope, and taking a pencil from his pocket, re-addressed it.

"You know Mr. Chappell?" he said to the servant.

"Yes, sir."

"The elder gentleman, I mean—not the son."

"I know him, sir."

"Go and seek him out. You will find him in the house or about the grounds. Give him this telegram, and if he wishes to see me, tell him I am here."

The servant bowed, and went on his errand.

"So," soliloquized Mr. Armstrong, "the blow has fallen at last, beyond the possibility of a doubt. How will he bear the shock? Is his bank strong enough to stand it? I doubt it—I doubt it. This day may live long in the memory of some of my guests."

His thoughts were wrested from their groove by the appearance of Laura. He would have gone toward her, but seeing that she was weeping, he did not carry out his intention. Another circumstance restrained him. He saw Richard Barton following her. Not wishing to play the spy upon them, he turned into a small embowered summer-house, one of many which dotted the gardens, thinking he should find an egress on the other side. Most of the guests were in the ball-room, the young people dancing, and the elder ones looking on, so that those persons who have played the principal parts in our story were in comparative retirement.

CHAPTER IX.

LAURA AND RICHARD.

LAURA knew that Richard had followed her, and was standing by her side; but she did not dare to raise her eyes to his face.

"We are alone now," he said; "may I speak?"

He paused for a reply, but none came.

"In what way have I offended you?" he asked, sadly, "that you refuse to answer me."

"You have not offended me," she sighed.

"The more, then, does your conduct need explanation—unless, indeed," he added, drawing his breath quickly, "you with the others, believe that the verdict which condemned my father to banishment and threats to darken my life was a just one."

"I pity and sympathize with you," she said. "I feel with you that your father was innocent."

His countenance brightened somewhat.

"Why, then, have you avoided me to-night? My note implored you to give me an opportunity of seeing and speaking to you; and I have, as it were, been compelled to thrust myself upon you. Was this generous?"

"I had my reasons," she answered. "I did it for your sake, for mine—for the sake of another whom I must not name."

"It will be for me to name him presently," he said, bitterly. "Your words give color to what I have heard, and yet to me it is so incredible that I will not, I cannot believe it unless I have it from your own lips. Laura—nay, we are cousins, and I may call you so—you do not forget the day we first met; it is not long ago. I told you then that I had seen you on the previous night; but until now I have not told you that, had we not met in the way we did, I should have been impelled, by the hope your face raised in my heart, to seek you out. But when we met, and when, to my delight and astonishment, I learned your name, I blessed the unhappy chance which brought me to this country. I knew that my father had a brother in England. In those sad days before his death, during which he related to me his pitiful story, he spoke of his brother frequently, and of the love which had existed between them when they were boys; but he had no expectation that we should ever meet, or he would, I am certain—knowing that he had not long to live, and out of his own heart's tenderness—have given me a message of love and forgiveness for him. Until that time I was ignorant of my father's history. By his just and gentle life he had wiped out all memory of the stain, and no ungenerous word with reference to his past ever reached my ears even from a stranger's lips. When, then, in pursuance of my resolve to prove my father innocent of the crime for which he suffered, I came to this country and so strangely met you, I determined to keep my secret until I had accomplished my purpose. Then I would say to you, 'Laura, I am your cousin, and I love you faithfully, honestly, sincerely.' I would say to your father, 'You did my father an injustice by leaguering with the world against him; give me your daughter, whom I love, as an atonement.' I imagined myself relating to you the story of my mother's devotion to the man she loved, and saying, 'There is but one woman in the world worthy to be placed by her side—that woman is yourself.' It seemed to me that there was a fate in it, and I prayed and hoped—believing in my vanity, that I had reason for my hope—that all this would come to pass. I have asked myself since if I erred in not telling you the story frankly at first"—

"No, no!"

"But, now it is known, if there is a tie that should draw us together, it is that. Laura, I have come now to speak to you perhaps for the last time, and therefore I must speak plainly. What I say now, I say with all the earnestness of my soul. As you value truth and virtue, and all that is most precious to man and woman, I implore you to deal honestly by me. If after this interview you ask me never to see you more, I promise never, unless pure accident compels me, to look upon your face again. You believe me, do you not?"

"Yes."

"My conduct in your eyes must be open to no misconception. The world must misjudge me if it will; one man's weak word against its judgment avails little, as I have learned to my sorrow. But you, the only woman I ever loved, the only woman I ever shall love, must not doubt my truth and my honor. You of all others must not do me that injustice."

"I have not done so," she faltered, trembling at his passionate earnestness.

"In your thoughts you may not have done so; but then they are at variance with your words and actions. On the last night we met, Mrs. Fangle and I spoke of you, in confidence, not for the first time. That good woman, who, I was led to suppose, was your confidante, had some knowledge of the feelings I entertained towards you, and in the kindness of her heart, and in perfect sincerity, gave me encouragement. She knew that on that night—which commenced so happily for me, and ended so bitterly—I intended to ask you to become my wife. I came to you, and for a moment was confounded by your changed manner. Hitherto you had invariably received me with bright looks, and as though my presence were not displeasing to you; suddenly, without any cause or reason that I could discover, you repulsed me, and refused to listen to me. You spoke of duty, and gave me to understand that it stood in the way of Love. How—and in what way? Laura, you must deal plainly with me. All the happiness of my life is in your hands. You knew that I loved you—you could not fail to know it. No woman is blind to a man's devotion; few women can fail to discover when that devotion is pure and free from taint—as mine was. You made me believe that you loved me."

She held out her hands, as though imploring him to spare her, but he went on.

"Every time we met you told me so—not in words, for you never overstepped the boundary of modesty. And yet you told me so, and my love was known to you, as yours was believed in and hoped for by me."

He paused here, for he could not but perceive that her emotion was overcoming her. The moon was rising, and the grief on her face was plainly visible to

him. He gazed steadily and earnestly at her; but his purpose was fixed, and his heart was so deeply charged with earnestness that he could not rest until he had convinced himself of her truth or falsehood. He knew that he might never have another opportunity of addressing her without reserve.

"You have given me the right to speak, and I must speak. I may never see you more. If what I fear is true, I shall soon bid good-bye to England, leaving my happiness behind me. Let me take away with me the comfort of knowing that you are not like some women I have read of—women who have no regard for truth and honesty; who will play with a man's heart, and plant therein the seed of love only to poison it, and rob it forever of its freshness. Let me at least continue to respect you."

"What would you have me say?" she asked, faintly.

He answered her with cruel directness. "That you do or do not love me."

The words roused her to strength. They brought her duty clearly before her. She thought of the man who loved her, and trusted her, and to whom she had given her promise. With soft passion, and yet in as clear a tone as Richard had spoken, she asked, as for the first time she raised her tearful eyes to his face!

"Knowing what you know, can I in honor?"

It may be forgiven him that this appeal to his manliness did not touch him as it should have done. Other passions deadened for a time the better, higher feelings of his nature.

"Knowing what I know!" he repeated, slowly. "In what way am I to understand that? That you love me, and dare not say so; or that you do not love me, and are fearful of confessing you have played with my feelings?"

Silence was his answer. Had he been aware of the agony she was suffering, of the hard battle she was fighting with her heart, he would have pitied and spared her.

"Then all is over between us," he said in a hard tone, which it pained him as much to use as it did her to hear, "and my life is embittered to the last day. But before I go, there is something to say. It will be the best that nothing shall remain in doubt. You told me that you avoided me for my sake and your own, and for the sake of another you must not name. I will name him. Mr. Armstrong. Answer me in honesty."

"It was he I meant."

"Then what I heard by accident is true. He is your lover. You are engaged to be married to him."

"Yes."

"Once," said Richard gently, after a pause, "when he and I were speaking together, and opening our hearts to each other, he said that love had come to him, and that it had brought into his life its sweetest hope. Knowing him, I know of what kind of love he is capable. He is a true, earnest man." She looked at Richard gratefully; he planted a dagger in her bosom in return. "Do you love him?"

"Is it generous of you to ask?" she said appealingly.

"I did not think of that," he replied, bitterly. "I have heard enough, and I will not betray you. Carry your false love to one whose every action bespeaks the nobility of his nature—to one whom any man might be proud to call friend, whom any woman might be proud to win and blessed to love, if she loved truly. Farewell."

She laid her hands upon his arm with gentle firmness. She looked into his face with pitying, pleading eyes.

"Stay," she said; "you have sought me, and have spoken bitter words. You must not leave me with thoughts in your mind which wrong us both."

He bowed, and stood before her in silence.

"Do not harden your heart to me," she said; "listen to me with it, and pity and respect me. There is something due to me as well as to you. Ah, you said rightly when you spoke of him to whom I have given my word. Any man might be proud to call him friend. Any woman loving him might be blessed in his love. But, dear friend, love, bright and beautiful though it be, is not the most sacred feeling of our nature. Duty is before us. Right-doing is before us. He saved my father from disgrace—from shame for my sake. He nobly paid the debt which my father believed to be owing, but which we know now was never due—for the wrong was not committed by one of our blood. Not knowing it was he who had performed this noble act, believing it was you, I promised to reward with my love the man who had removed the stain from my father's name, and the shame from my father's life. To break that promise now would break my father's heart; my father, whose life, until the present, has been a life of misery and humiliation. Can I do this? Dare I do this? Should I not rather sacrifice my selfish passion, and strive not to think of the happiness which might have been mine in the consciousness that I am performing a sacred duty? Aid me in this, as you love me! Assist me in this, as you know and see my heart! From this moment we must be strangers to each other. As you take away with you the knowledge that she you loved is parted from you by a higher duty than that of love, so give me the consolation of thinking that you approve, in the midst of your own unhappiness, the task I am pledged to perform, the duty I dare not shrink from! They shall never know. Striving to do right, peace will come at last to you and to me. Now go, and may heaven bless and reward you!"

She held out her hand to him, and he kissed it, with a look of love and reverence. Then she turned from him, and sank into a seat, exhausted by emotion. He also turned to go, when Mr. Armstrong's voice arrested his steps.

CHAPTER X.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

RICHARD had no means of ascertaining from what direction Mr. Armstrong had approached him. He would have escaped if he could, but Mr. Armstrong was too quick for him; the American might have risen from the ground, so suddenly and silently did he appear upon the scene.

"Where have you been hiding yourself all the evening, Richard?" said Mr. Armstrong. "I have been hunting everywhere for you."

He did not appear to notice Laura, whose face was buried in her hands. As he spoke, he took Richard's arm, and in a natural, unconstrained manner drew him a few steps from where Laura was sitting.

"I had no wish to be seen," replied Richard, not looking at his friend. Had he done so, he would have been startled at the expression on the American's face, and puzzled to account for it. The hard lines—which, in the light of the glowing hope that animated him, had lately softened somewhat—had come out again, with more than their old intensity, the lips were firmly compressed, the forehead was wrinkled, and the eyelids were contracted and almost hidden in their upward curve to the eyebrows; the entire face bore the impress of stern, inflexible resolution, not devoid of a certain sad sweetness.

"I have news for you, Richard. Mr. Fangle intends to earn the reward you have offered for the discovery of Charles Davidge."

Probably, in his state of mind, no other theme would have roused an active interest in Richard's breast.

"He is alive, then!" he cried, excitedly.

"Yes."

Richard's nostrils dilated, and he looked around restlessly. "Where is Mr. Fangle?"

"He will be here presently; we shall have a better chance of seeing him if we remain near this spot than if we went in search of him. What will you do if you meet this man, as you desired, face to face?"

"Accuse him—denounce him! Oh, that I knew of a charm to wring confession from his guilty lips in your presence! How—how is it to be done? If his fears could be worked upon—if in some way I could strike terror to his guilty heart!"

"Be calm, Richard."

"Ah, it is easy for you to say that." Mr. Armstrong smiled sadly. "No, no, Armstrong, I did not mean it. Not from me to you should come words that imply reproach. But to see this man, whose false life has been one long shameful lie, and to hear him deny the charge I bring against him, although heaven and justice are on my side!—it will madden me! it will madden me!"

"You will live these feelings down," said the American, "or you will learn by-and-by to bear grief with resignation. Life is full of disappointments, Richard. When all seems fair before us comes the storm in which our happiness is wrecked. Beneath the beautiful waters over which our boat is calmly gliding, we see bright flowers and grasses, and we smile securely as we pass over them. But within that waving mass of color a rock lies concealed; we strike upon it, and our boat is shattered to pieces. Dismayed, we look back—the flowers have vanished. They were never there, Richard; our vanity and blindness conjured them up. The peaceful, happy days are gone forever, never to return, and nothing is left us but resignation, or the comfort which comes from cold philosophy, or the hope which springs from the faith in a better time in the hereafter."

The pathos in his tone brought tears to Richard's eyes, and he continued the theme, but in a different spirit from that which animated his friend.

"Or are these flowers shaped, these colors painted, by fate, to mock us? If we are wrecked believing in them, the fault is not ours. It was neither our vanity nor our blindness that conjured them up. I have not the patience of resignation, nor can I find comfort in philosophy. But my heart is too full to argue. I am sick of the world. I would that I had limited my experience of it to the far away country in which I was born, and to which I shall soon return, bruised and heart-broken, robbed of all that could make life dear to me."

"You would have found your experience there, Richard, had you never felt it. And you are really going to leave us?"

"Can you wonder at it? Have I not proved that sweet words have a bitter taste, and the hand of friendship has a sting in it?"

"No. You have not yet proved that. You are too young to be soured with the world, and I was wrong in encouraging you; I spoke out of my own heart, not out of yours. Take courage."

"Do not misjudge me, Armstrong. I believe in your friendship and truth. But when I tell you that my dearest hopes have been crushed, and that even in you I dare not confide, you will pity, although you cannot console me."

"Suffering is our heritage. To suffer bravely shows true nobility. Again I say, take courage. I promised to be your friend, and I will not fail you."

He grasped Richard's hand, and beckoned to Mr. Fangle, who was standing at a little distance from them, and whom Richard did not for the moment see.

"I did not like to intrude upon you," said Mr. Fangle, "but I wished to tell you that Mr. Chappell is coming this way. Perhaps you have not glanced through *The Moon*. It is positively true that the *Golden Mariner* is lost. Everybody is speaking of the disaster, and Mr. Chappell is almost distracted. I never saw a man in such a condition—talking to himself, and glaring about him, really as though he were a little bit"—Mr. Fangle touched his forehead significantly.

Mr. Fangle's words seemed to inspire Mr. Armstrong with a sudden resolution. He thought of what Richard had said, "If his fears could be worked upon—if in some way I could strike terror to his guilty heart!"

"Hasten away, Mr. Fangle," he said, in a very strangely stern tone, "and instantly bring as many of our friends here as you can find. The earning of that five hundred pounds depends upon your promptitude."

Mr. Fangle did not wait for another word.

"Richard," then said Mr. Armstrong to his friend, "I am tempted to make a strange experiment in your interest. It may fail, but it is worth the trial. The time seems ripe for it. Do not be surprised at anything you may see or hear, and speak only when, in your judgment, the proper moment has arrived. I learn from what you have told me that your father believed that this Charles Davidge, his fellow-clerk, was guilty of the crime for which he suffered."

"He declared it most solemnly," replied Richard.

"You will see Charles Davidge presently," added Mr. Armstrong, "and the opportunity will present itself of eliciting the truth."

He waved Richard back upon the entrance of Mr. Chappell, whose sight was so blurred by excitement that he did not perceive that other actors than himself and Mr. Armstrong were present. His face was wild and haggard, and he looked about with the air of a hunted animal. He had ample cause for his excitement. Before twenty-four hours passed over his head it would be known that he was a ruined man. The sudden withdrawal of Richard Barton's account, in conjunction with the disastrous collapse of an extreme venture in which he had been for some time engaged, were sufficient in themselves to bring about the result; and even had there been a loop-hole through which he might have escaped, the confirmation of the rumors respecting the loss of the *Golden Mariner* was sufficient to effectually close it up. Tomorrow he would be not only a ruined but a disgraced man, for he had tampered with money and securities upon which he had no claim, and there was no possible way of avoiding exposure. He had been playing this game secretly for years, trading upon the credit and honorable name which the firm had earned in its long and hitherto unblemished career; but now the game was up, and he was bankrupt and dishonored. He had still another cause for fear. He had seen the advertisement in Mr. Armstrong's newspaper respecting Charles Davidge, and the shadow of a great crime committed in his youth stole over his soul like a funeral pall, and seemed to shut out all hope. In a voice thick more from fear than from passion, he accosted Mr. Armstrong.

"What is the meaning of this telegram you sent me, sir?" he cried, holding out the paper with a shaking hand. "Is it true that the ship is lost? You ought to know, sir, for you as well as I have a heavy stake in it. And what is meant by that advertisement in your paper, for it is yours, notwithstanding your silence?"

His voice suddenly failed him. Mr. Armstrong's stern gaze struck terror to his heart, and beneath its compelling power and his mental agony his strength gave way. He staggered and almost fell into a seat, seeing nothing distinctly with the exception of those glittering, accusing eyes which never left him, and upon which his own were fixed in speechless fear. Every moment that passed intensified the spell which seemed to be cast upon him, but which for the most part he really created for himself out of his own fears and despair. He was not aware that others had by this time appeared upon the scene, among them his wife, Lord Beaumorris, Mr. Fangle, and Rigby, who, seeing Laura standing alone, sad and pale, hastened to her side and passed his arm around her. Lord Beaumorris was the first to speak.

"Deplorable news—deplorable!" he said, addressing himself to Mr. Armstrong. "Four hundred souls on board—all lost but two—paragraph in *The Moon*—deplorable! There is no doubt—eh, Mr. Armstrong—its truth. The newspapers don't tell—hem!—stories, do they?"

"Not intentionally, my lord, I believe," replied Mr. Armstrong. "I am afraid that the news is too true, and that the *Golden Mariner* is really lost."

Mr. Fangle sidled close to Mr. Armstrong.

"Wonderful paper, *The Moon*," he said, "the people's paper. Always something extraordinary in it. On the very page containing the announcement of the loss of the ship, is that curious advertisement"—Checking himself, he whispered to Mr. Armstrong, "Is this the proper time? Shall I tell it now, and earn the money?"

"Yes," said Mr. Armstrong, not stirring from his position in front of Mr. Chappell; "you can speak now."

"That curious advertisement offering a reward of five hundred pounds for the discovery of Charles Davidge."

Mrs. Chappell started forward indignantly. "Offering a reward," she cried, "for the discovery of Charles Davidge? Who has dared to be guilty of such an act of insolence? Do you hear, Mr. Chappell? You must discover the person who has presumed to put in such an advertisement and punish him. The Government should not allow these slanderous papers to be printed."

But Mr. Chappell did not heed her; his features were set, and almost rigid, and he did not appear to have the power to remove his eyes from Mr. Armstrong. Mrs. Chappell would have approached him closer, but Mr. Armstrong, by gently interposing his arm, restrained her.

"Why does he not answer me?" she asked in alarm. "Mr. Armstrong, why does he fix his eyes so strangely upon you?"

Attracted by the strangeness of the scene, some twenty or thirty persons were now gathered together, and stood in a semicircle around the principal actors.

"I request all here to be silent," said Mr. Armstrong, in slow, measured tones, "with the exception of those who are immediately interested in what is about to take place."

The spectators obeyed him, and kept their places in silent and curious expectation.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ARMSTRONG REDEEMS HIS PROMISE.

"MRS. CHAPPELL," continued Mr. Armstrong, "you pledged me to give you a proof of the power of a strong will over a disturbed mind. I am about to redeem my pledge."

"But not upon my husband, surely?"

"Yes, upon your husband. Without premeditation on my part, the opportunity has most strangely presented itself of fulfilling the unwilling promise you extracted from me."

"You frighten me," said Mrs. Chappell, imploringly, in an under-tone; "I entreat you to release my husband from the spell you have placed upon him."

"Reflect before you ask me again. It may be out of my power to release him. Of what has actually brought him to this pass I have my suspicions, but no positive knowledge. But it is my duty to tell you that his honor and good name may suffer if you are not careful."

"His honor!" she exclaimed, proudly and scornfully; "who can touch that?"

"Himself only. Are you afraid that he can say anything to cast suspicion upon it?"

"You proclaim yourself not to be my friend by the question. I have been deceived in you."

"I have a duty to perform, and I must perform it." "I do not understand you. I also have a duty to perform. I see a person here"—she glanced at Richard, whom she now perceived for the first time—"whose presence is an insult. I absolve you from your promise. If you will allow me, my husband and I will now take our leave."

"You are my guest," said Mr. Armstrong, courteously, yet firmly, "and I am bound to obey you if you insist. But take heed; a shadow—a shame—rests upon the honor of your house. I state this publicly. At this time, and at this time only, your husband can remove it by a word. If he and you depart from this assembly without the opportunity for denial being given to him, that shame may rest there forever. All that I shall do will be to ask him two or three simple questions, to which he must—HE MUST!—return truthful replies."

"You shall answer to me for this!" exclaimed Frederick Chappell, furiously. He had but just pushed his way through the crowd.

"I distinctly declare," said Mr. Armstrong, not noticing the threat, "to those ladies and gentlemen who have honored me with their presence to-night, and who have heard what has passed, that it is imperatively necessary for the credit of Mr. Chappell's good name that these questions should be asked. It is for you, madam, now to decide."

Mrs. Chappell saw in the faces of those who surrounded her, and whose curiosity had reached the highest pitch, that she would be compromised if she did not yield. Why should she hesitate, indeed? She had nothing to fear.

"My lord," she said to Lord Beaumorris, "you, as a gentleman and a man of honor, will decide for me. I am a weak woman, and—a wife. What am I to do?"

"You say, sir," said Lord Beaumorris to Mr. Armstrong, "that this strange scene—is unpremeditated—on your part."

"Entirely so, my lord."

"You give me your word—upon this as a—a gentleman."

"I give you my word, my lord, as a gentleman." Lord Beaumorris bowed. "And you say that the honor—the honor of Mr. Chappell—who really looks—as though something extraordinary—had or was about—to take place?"

Frederick Chappell interrupted him violently. "I will not," he cried, "allow this to proceed any further."

"Sir," said Lord Beaumorris, with a stately air.

"Mrs. Chappell has placed herself in my hands."

"Frederick," interposed Mrs. Chappell. "I command you to be silent. Our honor is safe with Lord Beaumorris."

"Exactly so—hem! It is a point of honor. You say, Mr. Armstrong—that Mr. Chappell's honor—honor—is concerned in the questions—you wish to ask him."

"Those were my words, my lord, and I am willing that your lordship shall afterward be the judge as to whether sufficient grounds exists for the present proceeding. If you decide that I have committed an error, I will make any public apology or reparation your lordship may suggest."

"In that case, madam," said Lord Beaumorris to Mrs. Chappell, "and as the matter—has gone—so far—I should, were I in your place—give Mr. Armstrong—permission. The proceeding—certainly—an eccentric one—but Mr. Armstrong—if he will pardon me, himself eccentric—and his statement—seems to me—to render it necessary—gravely necessary—that he should be allowed—to put these questions."

"Proceed, sir," said Mrs. Chappell, faintly.

"Rise," said Mr. Armstrong, addressing himself in a stern and hard tone to Mr. Chappell, "and listen to what is being said. Do you hear?"

Mr. Chappell rose, like one in a dream, and by a slight motion of his head indicated that his attention was aroused.

"You have a statement to make, Mr. Fangle," said the American.

"With reference to the singular advertisement in to-night's *Moon*. I supposed it was a hoax, for I did not see what is to come out of it. But I am assured that the advertisement is genuine, and I am naturally not averse to earning five hundred pounds. What man is? No man. I am not ashamed to say that my invention

has swallowed up all my available capital, and that five hundred pounds will about finish my little screw. Well, then—and I see no harm in making the statement—Charles Davidge, of course, is our friend, if he will permit me to call him so, and forgive me for the liberty—Charles Davidge is our friend, Mr. Chappell."

"He!" cried Richard, coming now to the front, and standing by the side of Mr. Armstrong, who made room for him. His appearance, trembling as he was under the influence of passionate excitement, added a new feature of interest to the scene to those who had not previously observed him. "This man, Charles Davidge!"

"Insolent!" exclaimed Mrs. Chappell. "You, then, are the author of the advertisement! My lord, I claim your protection. There never has been any mystery about the previous name of my husband. Had I supposed this person wished to know, I would have told him myself, upon his asking. When Mr. Chappell married, he took my father's name. It was the desire of my father, who had no sons, that the family name should be preserved and borne by the head of the bank. You shall be punished, sir, for this trick."

"Then here I denounce him!" cried Richard, in a ringing tone. "My father suffered for his crime!"

Frederick Chappell would have thrown himself upon Richard, but that one of the by-standers held him back.

"It is false!" cried Mrs. Chappell. "Mr. Chappell! Charles! Say that this vile accusation is false!"

No word passed Mr. Chappell's lips.

"Have you heard?" asked Mr. Armstrong, in a voice so steady and cold and stern as to afford a startling contrast to the voices of the other speakers. It was like marble by the side of molten metal.

With difficulty the lips of Mr. Chappell shaped an answer. "Yes." Only those who were close to him could hear the word.

"Upon his death-bed," then said Richard, solemnly, "soon to be summoned by the Supreme Judge of men, and by Him to be judged, my father swore to his innocence, and to his belief that this man was guilty!"

"It is a lie!" cried Mrs. Chappell. "A wicked lie!"

"Speak you the truth," said Mr. Armstrong to the banker. "As you hope for a merciful judgment yourself, was this man's father innocent or guilty? THE TRUTH, as you value your soul!"

Mr. Chappell shuddered, and the answer he gave, almost indistinctly and with difficulty, appeared to be wrung from him by an independent power.

"Innocent!"

Richard uttered a cry of joy, and turned his head aside to hide his grateful emotion.

But now Laura's father came forward, and spoke.

"Who, then, was guilty? Speak! Who was guilty?"

Not a sound was heard in reply. He stood there, self-convicted by his silence. Then, after a short pause, Mr. Armstrong turned his back upon the banker, as though releasing him from any power he might have held over him.

"You have made him utter this lie," said Mrs. Chappell, in a bitter tone, "to punish me for my wilfulness. Say that you have done so, if you have a grain of mercy in your breast!"

"You must question him yourself now, madam," replied the American. "I have nothing more to say to him."

Mr. Chappell in the meantime gazed around in a vacant manner, with the air of a man who had been suddenly roused from sleep.

"What has happened?" he said, passing his hand across his eyes. "Why do you look so strangely at me?"

He was dimly fearful that he had betrayed himself, or that his ruin and disgrace had already become known; his mind was so confused and disturbed that he had no clear consciousness of what had occurred. Seeing Richard and Mr. Armstrong, he shrunk back from them; they were standing side by side, and he knew that they were his enemies.

"Come," he said to his wife; "let us go."

"You must unsay first what you have been cajoled into declaring."

"What have I declared? Why are you so excited?"

"You have declared here before our friends—oh, I can scarcely speak it!—that this person's father, against whom you were the principal witness, was innocent of the crime for which he suffered."

"Nonsense!" replied Mr. Chappell, striving to be brave. "You must be dreaming, or I must have been. Who could believe such a thing?"

"I, sir," said Lord Beaumorris, speaking with stately distinctness. "I believe it; strangely as it has been brought about, you have spoken the truth, and your own condemnation. For the future we are strangers. I here declare," he said, raising his voice, "my entire belief in the innocence of this young man's father. Sir, a short time since I refused to take your hand. I ask you now to take mine. I welcome you to your proper position in society, and I tender to you my sympathy for the monstrous injustice inflicted on your father."

"I am deeply grateful to you, my lord," replied Richard. "I came to England to remove a stain from my father's memory, and by God's mercy I have succeeded. I know that I can do no more. The law is powerless now for me or my cause. I leave it to you and to other good men to make known my father's innocence."

"Sir, you may depend upon me; I promise that the affair shall be made public in the way you would most desire. You are a good son, and I am honored in your friendship."

"Will you forgive me," then said Rigby, humbly, coming forward, "for the unjust thoughts I have harbored against the man I loved, and who once loved me? Do not add to my punishment; it is already bitter enough. I humbly ask pardon of the dead and of you."

Richard passed his arm over the old man's shoulder. "My father, sir, would have embraced you as I do, had he lived to see this day."

Rigby pressed Richard to his breast and sobbed. "When he and I last met we were almost boys, and now he is dead; and I—what can repay me for my years of shame?"

"The sympathies of all just men will be yours, sir," said Richard, gently. "Do not let the injustice of the past poison the sweets of the future."

He sighed heavily as the words passed his lips. What was the future to be?

"The future!" sobbed Rigby, with a despairing gesture. "I stand upon its brink!"

Laura, seeing her father's agitation, drew him away, and spoke soothingly to him.

"I am ungrateful," he murmured, kissing her. "This day has made your future bright, and I repine. Dear child, forgive me."

His tears prevented him from noting the signs of unhappiness on her face.

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE'S VICTORY.

In the meantime, the guests who had witnessed this strange scene hurried away in search of friends and acquaintances to circulate the news, which very soon was in everybody's mouth. The Chappell's had disappeared; Lord Beaumorris had also taken his departure; only Laura, her father, Richard, and Mr. Armstrong remained upon the spot where the innocence of the dead had been established. Mr. Fangle and his wife stood at a little distance from these four, and, in obedience to certain whispered instructions given to them by Mr. Armstrong as the spectators moved away, prevented strangers from intruding upon the party.

"How can I thank you?" said Richard to Mr. Armstrong.

The American grasped Richard's hand. "Has the grasp of friendship a sting in it?"

"You have been to me the truest, noblest friend. You have taught me a lesson, Armstrong, which I shall remember with gratitude to my dying day."

"I will teach you another. After what has occurred, do you still intend to leave us?"

"No power can induce me to remain in England."

"No power? Laura!" he called. "You have not yet spoken to your cousin. Have you nothing to say to him?"

Laura came forward at Mr. Armstrong's bidding, but did not raise her eyes to Richard's face. Mr. Armstrong, standing between them, regarded them earnestly, and taking a hand in each of his, joined them and held them together. "Thus I join you," he said; "you can at least wish your cousin well, Laura."

"I wish you well, Richard," she said, softly.

"That being said," continued Mr. Armstrong, "the comedy is over; and thus I part you."

He unclasped their hands, and Richard turned away with a heavy heart.

"You know, Laura," said Mr. Armstrong, drawing her aside out of the hearing of the others, "that your cousin intends to leave England?"

"Yes."

"When did you learn this?"

"To-night—a very short time since."

"You have bidden him farewell, then?"

"Yes."

"Laura, when I asked you to be my wife, you believed in the sincerity of my love?"

"How, knowing you," she replied timidly, "could I believe otherwise?"

"And you believe in it still?"

"I do."

"You may, my child. I love you very truly—so truly that I would part with my life rather than make you unhappy."

"I am sure you would: I will strive to repay you for your goodness to me—indeed, indeed, I will!"

"Yet your tone throws a shadow of sadness upon the words. Not thus should the affianced wife speak to the affianced husband."

"Forgive me"—she pleaded, and would have proceeded, but he gently checked her.

"Child, there is nothing to forgive. In your slight knowledge of me—slight, because it is only when persons live together that their inner natures are revealed to each other—have you ever known me to swerve from truth or honor?"

"Why do you ask me these questions?" she said, gathering strength, as it were, from the sadness of his manner; she felt that he was suffering, and it was her duty to comfort him if it lay in her power. "You are enshrined in my heart as the most faithful and truthful of men."

He hid his face from her for a moment.

"There is no merit in me, my dear, except that which belongs to sincerity. I may claim that, I think. All the rest springs from your generosity and unselfishness. When we spoke together an hour ago, I asked that there should be no cloud between us, no doubt, no mistrust."

"I do not mistrust you; I believe with all my heart in your faith and truth."

"So would I believe in yours."

The words brought a chill to her soul. She dared not ask him, "And do you not?" She trembled before him, not knowing what was to come.

"Child, child," he said, "when I wooed you, I did not require a sacrifice from you. I believed that your heart was mine. I want to bring love's sunshine into your life, not to blot it out forever. If I were to ask you what passed between you and your cousin at your last interview, on this very spot?"

"Do not ask me!" she implored. "I dare not tell you."

"Look up, my dear," he said, in a kind voice. "Nay, look me steadily in the face."

She obeyed him, and her eyes, swimming with tears, rested on his.

"God bless you, my dear," he said, "and make your life a bright and happy one!"

He went to Richard, and brought him to where Laura was standing.

"Richard, this child, drooping before us, has promised to be my wife. I raise her face to mine, and give her the first kiss my lips have ever impressed upon her cheek. And with that kiss—the first and last—I release her from her promise! I have learned her secret and yours, and I make now the hardest sacrifice of my life—yet in that sacrifice there is a victory. Bear with me both, for there is unutterable pain in my heart. I think of the words she addressed to you, Richard—yes, I overheard them—'Striving to do right, peace will come at last to me.' As this dear child seemed to see her duty before her, and did not shrink from performing it, so do I see mine. Take her, Richard. She is yours."

THE END.

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